

IDYLLS OF GREECE

HOWARD V. SUTHERLAND



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IN PREPARATION

PROTE

A PLAY

IDYLLS OF GREECE

IDYLLS OF GREECE

(Second Series)

BY
HOWARD V. SUTHERLAND

At the end of the world lie the Gardens of Peace
Where gentle-eyed men tell the dreams of the Past.



Desmond FitzGerald, Inc.
NEW YORK

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1910

Printed in U. S. A.

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To

FRANK AND ELIZABETH DEARDORF

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PHYLLIS AND DEMOPHOON

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PHYLLIS AND DEMOPHOON

BENEATH the silv'ry sympathy of stars
That watch the patient progress of the
world,

Than maiden's love there is no truer thing,
Nor aught more pure beneath the flaming
suns.

The finish'd orb that turn'd while yet the earth
Flared fearfully in darkness; that beheld
The patient shaping of its loveliness,
And view'd its growing grace expectantly,
Is slave to Change; shall wane and headlong
plunge

Adown the Night's insatiable maw.
But maiden's love is like the primal calm
That brooded over Chaos—asking not
The Why or When, and caring not though
gods

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Create the dream and then dissolve again.
For, like the simple flower in yonder field,
That shows but once its beauty to the dawn
And languishes ere even, maiden's love
Is still and constant to the cherish'd thing—
Its altar and its lodestone, and its peace.
And though that pass, as all things fair must
pass,
And all dreams prove a dream's futility,
The love lives on, like fragrance, and the while
Scents the soft air and soothes the troubled
world.

And even as the modest daffodil
Must rue the fickleness of early Winds
And mourn their heartless wooing, so the maid
Who loves when Fate opposes, and the gods
Turn lovers' vows to idle promises,
Must bear her lot; must bend, but give no sign,
As bends the chasten'd lily, but is mute.

NOR darts nor spears now menaced broken
Troy;
The trumpets had been silenced, and from where
The yellow plains were black with heroes' blood
The sated jackal howl'd beneath the moon.
For ten long years the fated town had worn
Its pulsing necklace—rows of armèd men
And awful engines. Grecian hosts had come

PHYLLIS AND DEMOPHOON

Array'd in bronze and skins of tawny beasts,
Or glinting splendor of a war-like day;
Had pitch'd white tents before the batter'd
walls

And, shouting, rush'd to grapple with their foe.
And hosts had gone while yet the sun shone red,
While yet life leap'd within them, to the dark
Where, voiceless now and cold, they fought no
more,

Nor cared though fell the pillars of the world.
Old Priam, too, was gather'd to his sons,
Weary of life, of women, and the war
Men waged for Helen's whiteness, while she lay
And watch'd through heavy and adult'rous eyes
The daily change of battle. Now the winds
From Ilium's plain upraised the dust and char
That once was Troy; the sun-glare smote
thereon;

The milder glances of the grieving moon
Touch'd it again in pity. But no more
From sacred courts would priests implore the
gods,

Or from the walls the brass-helm'd sentry call;
For Priam now was dead, and low the sons
On whom he propp'd his utter weariness.
And one by one the Grecian triremes turn'd
Their high prows westward, and the oars shot
forth

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Like human hands and smote the sapphire waves,
Impelling homeward. And the heroes sang
Ajax and wise Ulysses, Menelaus
And mighty Agamemnon; then they told
The rolling flood of how Achilles slew
The son of Priam, Hector; and the slaves,
Chain'd to the oars, would howl as wolves may
howl,

Whom instinct tells of carnage. But at night,
When slept the heroes, and the sea lay still
And brooded on the boastfulness of men,
The sweating slaves would groan and bite their
chains,
And call on Death to free them from the oars.

AMONG the last to lift his face toward home
Was Demophoon of Athens, king in mien,
And doubly king in bearing; one on whom
The gods had smiled, and made invincible
In fiercest fight; one favor'd of the stars,
Yet man enough to love where lit his glance,
And man enough as quickly to forget.
For two long years his eyes had gazed on men
And all the bloody incidents of war;
Glory had waved her banners over him,
Yet Death had let him triumph; now he strode
The heaving deck, impatient, heeding not
The dangers or the favors of the past,

But only what the gods had yet to give.
His trusted captain, Halmus, stood apart
And watch'd the sea, as one may watch the
face

Of one most loved. A grizzled mariner
Whose words were few, he knew its ev'ry mood,
And scented now the coming of a storm
From out the east, where all was ebon black,
As if the winds had heap'd the darkness there
To stay the dawn's advances. Troy was now
Ten days a dream, as all the Past's a dream,
A thing to sing of when the embers glow,
And winter's winds push roughly at the door.
And Halmus knew that it were wise to find
A shelt'ring coast, and face the open sea
When wind and waves subsided. "Demophoon,"
He said, as came the other to his side:
"The sea is anger'd. It were best to turn
Before the storm is on us. To the north
The Thracian headlands offer harborage.
If thou and I were on this ship alone
We would not care; Death comes but once, my
king;
But wives and babes await in Athens now
The freight we bear, these men who laugh'd at
him
Too long for us to sacrifice them now."
And Demophoon was kingly. "Turn the ship,"

IDYLLS OF GREECE

He cried, "when thou art ready. Fight no more,

For Greece still needs her heroes ; brave art thou,
And lovest well thy fellows." Then at once
The oarsmen heard the order, and the prow
Made answer slowly till the roaring wind
Had fill'd the mighty bellies of the sails,
And soon the ship raced northward. Now the
sky

Was grey and heavy, and the sea was grey
As if with ancient trouble ; but the waves
Still smote the ship and flung the stinging foam
Upon the cringing rowers. All that day
The waters hiss'd their fury ; and when night
Had blotted out the light's faint sympathy,
And stars and moon, the sailors' comforters,
Were hid behind the anger-swollen clouds,
They rose like shifting mountains, menacing
The creaking ship and all who strove thereon.
But Halmus still stood keen-eyed at the prow
With Demophoon beside him. Silently
They watch'd the piling waters in their wake,
Or faced the dark before them. Overhead
The shrilling Winds were singing lustily
Such songs as they delight in ; but, below,
Was heard the groaning of the haggard slaves
Who tugg'd by turns upon the dripping oars
And cursed the overseer. In the hold

PHYLLIS AND DEMOPHOON

The heroes swore defiance of the gods,
And smote their hands together ; but, above,
The captain still stood guard with Demophoon,
And all around them scream'd the dreadful
storm.

AND when the morn broke, Nature seem'd
outworn—

The Winds had hurried eastward, and where
brood

The Asian deserts, woke the fleet, wild horse,
And fearful lions in their shelter'd lairs.

But higher still the sea uplifted now

Its racing waves ; and erst as that day died,

And one by one the stars look'd out again,

The liquid mountains sank to peaceful hills

And hills became an undulating plain.

But even then the slaves cried dismally

And strove to steal swift glances through the
ports

To see if land were nearing. And the light

That danced upon the waters lit their eyes

And made them gleam with madness, and the
blood

Show'd black upon their shoulders ; still they
row'd,

Or bit their chains, or cursed until the lash

Fell on their wounds and open'd them again.

And while the ship raced onward, Demophoon
 And Halmus sat together, and made light
 Of storm and danger. "By to-morrow's dawn
 The headland should confront us," Halmus said;
 "And thou, my king, as thou art done with war,
 Perhaps to gentler things thy thoughts may
 turn.

Lycurgus rules in Thrace, and men have said
 His daughter Phyllis is a maid most fair,
 A maid for kings, although Athenians say
 His people still are savage. Thou art young;
 Who knows but she may lure thee from the ways
 Of single men, and teach thee life indeed!"
 "I, too, have heard of Phyllis," said the king.
 "'Tis said young Naxos pined for love of her
 And faced the Trojan arrows day and night,
 Preferring poison'd barbs when Cupid's dart
 Had made his young life bitter. When he died
 That day the wall released him, I was near,
 And strove to lift the heavy masonry
 From off his mangled bosom. Naught he said
 Except the one word "Phyllis." Then his face
 Was grey as was the sea this awful morn,
 And from his eyes the light pass'd suddenly.
 For two long years my thoughts have been with
 men;

Music to me has been the clang of swords
 On slanting shields, the short, hoarse battle cry,

PHYLLIS AND DEMOPHOON

The shouts of victors or the captives' prayers.
And now, rememb'ring Helen, I am loth
To see myself a slave to all that wakes
Another's envy and another's hate."
But Halmus drew his fingers through his beard:
"Love and the stars last ever. Who art thou
To say 'I will'? The gods are over thee,
And theirs it is to say what things shall be.
These fifty years the sea has been my bride;
Each mood of hers I know. I know each wave,
That rises once and then is lost again
Amid the water's beauty. Storm or calm
Proves unto me her passion; and her foam
Is like the light-tipp'd fingers of the Queen,
The Cytheræan, whom the birds adore.
True have I been to her, and she to me,
Though faithless unto others; and because
She lures her thousand suitors to their death,
Shall I evade her wooing, or dictate
How gods shall prick my final journeyings?"
But Demophoon look'd moodily to sea
And seemed to weigh his answer. "Thou and I
Are equal only in the eyes of Death,
O Halmus, hardy sailor," he replied.
"The many love; the king must stand alone.
Care sits upon his shoulders; at his heels
Suspicion creeps with her insidious voice.
The very hand that proffers him his cup

IDYLLS OF GREECE

May drop a poison in it. Would I were
A man like thee, a simple mariner,
Whose days are spent beneath the splendid skies,
Whose nights are nights of danger, or of peace.
I would I were a peasant, one who treads
The dewy hills at dawn-burst, and beholds
The heaven attired in all its changing hues.
He walks with gods who shuns the heartless town
Where strong men wither, and the mothers pale
To see their children sicken. I would give
Sceptre and crown to own a simple hut,
Whereof a hound is guardian, with its smoke
More dear than all the incense of the East.
Then would I woo some maid, whose only dream
Should be of children and the twilight hour
That drove me homeward with my labor done
And hands outstretch'd to her hands. I would
draw
The dear thing to me as the sun doth draw
The happy sunflower, that with upturn'd face
Awaits a golden blessing. She and I—
But thou the sailor art, and I, the king,
Whose crown has made the dream impossible.
Stars would be suns, the sun would be a star;
The gods must surely pity man's unrest."
And Halmus answer'd not. For he had loved,
And knew the ache thereof and knew the joy;
And, knowing both, had sooner been a slave

PHYLLIS AND DEMOPHOON

And heir to women's kisses, than the king
Whose rank had kept him ever isolate.

AND while they both were musing, came a
man

Who pointed westward, and in sailor speech
Said land was now a few short miles away ;
And Halmus rose, and where the waves ran low
Beheld the shore. " My eyes can see," he said,
" How people leave the city on the cliff,
Assembling in such numbers that the sands
Are black in places. This, then, must be
Thrace,

Where now Lycurgus sits, and holds his court
Amid such savage splendor that the stars
Grow pale when once his palace lamps are lit.

'Tis like this Phyllis, whom the heroes sing
As once they sang of Helen, wears the wealth
Of half an Asian province on her breast.

Virtue and worth go ever unremark'd ;
The hero loves the tinsel and the sham,
But never sings in praise of diffidence."

And Demophoon, the soldier and the king,
Could answer naught. " To-morrow we may
sail,

If winds permit, for Athens," he replied.


" The slaves have labor'd staunchly. Bid them
rest

IDYLLS OF GREECE

That they may pull us happily to Greece,
And they shall toil no longer. Would that I
Were free as thou art; free as they shall be
To come and go, and do the things they will."
And when the slaves were told what gift was
theirs,

They strove to shout, but could not; and the
king

Knew well what meant that silence. But at last
The rhythmic movement of the oars proclaim'd
The wretches' gratitude; and while the moon
Still lit the swaying waters, and the lights
Along the shore grew clearer, up the beach
The vessel glided, and the oars were still.

ND when Lycurgus heard what king the
storm
Had driven there for shelter, he made
haste

To bid him welcome, for the day was done
Of enmity or war. And Demophoon
Approach'd the palace as in times of peace
A hero should approach it, through a host
Of shouting men and maids, whose beauty vied
With that of all the petal'd sisterhood
With which his path was cover'd. Thus, at last,

PHYLLIS AND DEMOPHOON

He reach'd the palace gardens, where the crowd
No more might enter ; and an ancient man
Array'd in white there met him and the few
Whose right it was to follow. Then by beds
Of strangest blooms and leafy, winding ways
That led each moment upward, they arrived
Where stood the palace with its gleaming stairs
And fountains flinging jewels to the sky.
And there Lycurgus met them. At his side
The maiden, Phyllis, flower'd, and all his court
Was ranged behind them like a scimeter
Of wisdom, wit and chosen loveliness.
And Phyllis, when she first saw Demophoon,
Felt as the bird feels when it sees the snare,
Yet, knowing well the danger, falls therein,
And then is lost forever. But no sign
The maiden gave of how her heart was touch'd,
Only her face turn'd paler. " We have heard
In Athens of thy beauty, gentle maid,"
Said Demophoon, as, bending o'er her hand,
He proffer'd her the homage due a queen.
" But, true in that, men's silv'ry tongues have
err'd
In saying that a Thracian pearl was lost
Amid a rugged setting ; here I find
Thy gracious father and a noble court
Lending a lustre to thy perfect grace."
Then said Lycurgus : " If thou retest here,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

We hope to prove that thought and elegance
Bide elsewhere than in Athens. On the field
Thou oft hast seen our heroes; here they wear
Their laurel-wreaths until the trumpets break
The dawn's cool hush, and bid them noise to
war."

"All this I fain would learn," said Demophoon,
"And rest a while where so much beauty is.
But morn must find me on the settled sea,
My ship's prow scenting Athens. Yesterday
I laugh'd at danger; now I face a foe
So subtle that the strongest man may fall
Who stays to dare him. Let me, therefore,
hence,

O wise Lycurgus; for, though wind and sea
Deliver'd me thy willing prisoner,
To them alone that wait me I belong
As ere I left for Ilium's windy plain."
And when pale Phyllis heard the hero speak
Her heart was all a-tremble. Well she knew
The foe he dreaded was her maiden charm,
Which catches men more easily than wit,
Minerva's wisdom or the gift of gold.

HAPPY the maid to whom, with sympathy,
The solemn gods grant beauty. At her
birth

The wild winds sing impassion'd harmonies,

PHYLLIS AND DEMOPHOON

And unseen splendors hover over her ;
And each fair bloom that claims companionship
With splendid stars uplifts its modest head
To bid its sister welcome with a smile.
Nature knows well when Loveliness is born.
At early dawn the first, faint sunbeam tells
The cool, lush grass ; and when the roses close,
The purple-robed announcers of the Night
Whisper the tale where brood the patient hills.
Remember'd ever is the burst of dawn ;
Death toucheth not the sunset. And with these
Is Beauty deathless ; changing, it retains
Perfection's spirit and is ever fair.

WHEN Phyllis saw Lycurgus answer'd not,
But stroked his beard and look'd upon the
ground,
She took his arm, then raised her gentle eyes
To Demophoon. "Thou must not haste," said
she
With warmth, and yet becoming modesty.
"For Rumor hath a quick and sland'rous
tongue ;
And what would Athens think if it were said
That Demophoon, who fear'd no foe at Troy,
Made haste from Thrace, because"—then stam-
mer'd she
And blush'd because she knew not what she said.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And Demophoon beheld her helplessness,
And pitied her: "Because," said he, "he fear'd
Beauty, that is more pitiless than Death.
Women, perhaps, would say that I was base,
A very coward in the lists of Love.
But men, fair maid, would say that I did right:
Who cannot love with honor, should not love."
"Ye argue like two children; like two birds
Ye twitter without thought," Lycurgus said,
And laid a hand upon an arm of each.
"It were not fair to leave us, Demophoon,
After so short a stay. The gods, perhaps,
Had purpose when they blew thee hitherward.
To rest is right, is good; and thou hast earn'd
The rest of heroes. Bide thou, then, with us.
These coming days are days of sacrifice,
And thou shalt see our temples. One we have
Which, seeing once, thou shalt desire to stay,
For fair it is, Athenian. Therefore, stay!
Tempt not the gods by venturing to sea
Before thou askest of the oracle
If waves shall bear thee homeward without
hurt."

Then Phyllis smiled, and lo! to Demophoon
It seem'd the world as suddenly contain'd
A thing till then found wanting. "Wilt thou
stay?"

She ask'd, yet knew his answer ere he spoke.

“ Our gardens are most pleasant. Trees there
be

Within whose shade the nightingales have sung
Their songs to me in childhood ; pretty pools
Where dream the lilies of the waxen buds
That brood on Nile’s still waters ; in the dells
The bees intone contentment, and the deer
Wander at will, and fear me not, nor mine.
Such things I fain would show thee, and much
more

If only thou wilt deign to stay our guest.”
What man when tempted thus, had still said
Nay?

Though all the stars had menaced him—dread
Mars,

And awful Sirius that from its post
Of utter exile wrecks the plots of men,
He still had waver’d. Though the Pleiades,
Saddest of constellations, had essay’d
To turn his course he still had follow’d her.
And when Lycurgus said: “ The maid speaks
well.

To stay with us and see the things she loves,
Will add a pleasure to their loveliness,”
He kiss’d her hand, and follow’d where they led.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

AND many days he linger'd, unaware
Of how she bound him with the wondrous
web

Of maiden charm. For he who looks too long
In woman's eyes must surely lose himself,
As yonder cloud that wooes the arching sky
Dissolves in fleecy passion and is lost.

Now morn by morn, while yet Lycurgus slept,
They trod the heights and watch'd the steady
sun,

Magnificently solemn, crack the dark
Above the distant solitudes of Troy,
And pour its wine along the Thracian hills.
With lifted arms they sang the morning hymns
To rosy-limbed Apollo; with the dew
They cool'd their flushing faces, and were glad.
The hill caves knew them also. Echo heard
Their careless laughter; and rememb'ring well
The one she loved, Narcissus, fill'd their ears
With all the ancient story of her woe.

And one by one he learnt the shady haunts
That made her gardens perfect; scentless dells
Of utter peace wherein the asphodel
Might slumber undisturb'd, and dream the
dreams

Of still, white flowers. And oft by shelter'd
pools

They linger'd, and were silent; or attuned

PHYLLIS AND DEMOPHOON

Their half-hush'd voices to the tiny brook
That tinkled o'er the stones amid the fern.
Thus pass'd a morn too quickly; and at noon,
When all the air was hot and tremulous,
They stay'd within the palace, while the slaves
Waved languor from them with their scented
fans,

And sang of loves departed with the leaves.
And Demophoon, although he knew it not,
Was often troubled by these songs of theirs;
And then his eyes would wander, and would rest
At last on Phyllis, and his heart would seem
A weight within him; for the lover thinks
When first he loves, or when he first grows fond,
His quest is hopeless, and the world is harsh
And all the stars against him. Night and day
He wraps his soul in sable, until She—
The thing he deems most perfect—is his own.
But Phyllis hid her love from Demophoon,
And even from the keenest of her maids;
“If so it be the gods decree it not,
My love is lost,” she said, and said no more.
Only at night when heaven seem'd all aflame,
And e'en the dusk was odorous and warm
With love-begetting silence, she would lean
A little closer to him; and perhaps
He lean'd to her, as men have ever lean'd
To beauty in the darkness. Thus they trod

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The winding ways of leafy loveliness,
And spoke but seldom. Dusk is consecrate
To love and lovers, and a sigh is then
More fraught with meaning than the wingèd
words

Lost in the golden sunlight. O'er their heads
A thrush would sometimes lift its liquid note
To where the stars were gather'd; but the dark
Soon charm'd the bird to silence, and again
Night's stilly benediction cover'd them.
And thus they came to where the sea now
croon'd

Its endless song, and, hearing it, became
Possessors of its secrets, and forgot
Their gilded fetters and their helplessness.
For Phyllis dream'd his love was now her own;
This very sea had minister'd to her,
Had borne him on its bosom; had upraised
Its many hands against his swift return
To Athens and his people. Now he stood
Beneath the stars beside her, and the sea
Would storm until he own'd himself her slave,
And perfect friendship turn'd to perfect love.
Thus Phyllis dream'd, as maidens often dream,
And, sometimes, men; and later, when the moon
Smiled chastely on her marbled loveliness
At rest upon her couch, she dream'd again
Of Demophoon, and night too swiftly fled.

PHYLLIS AND DEMOPHOON

BUT Halmus daily argued with his king
To leave the Thracian beauty. "Let us
hence.

The sea is calling loudly," he would say;
"And ev'ry ebb my anchor'd ship turns home
And strains to Greece. The heroes call on thee
To bring the maiden with thee, if thou wilt;
But they, too, long for Greece. The very
slaves,

Whose wounds in wanton idleness have heal'd,
Would bear thee home, and gain their liberty.
Sometimes in dreams I hear a distant cry,
A cry from Greece, for Demophoon, the king;
Thy people need thee, and the sea allures—
Let us, then, hence while yet the gods permit."
And Demophoon perused the other's eyes,
Then faced, with folded arms, the calling waves.
"Would we were back," he said at last, "in
Troy.

Amid this life I feel but ill at ease,
Halmus, my friend. My thoughts are still with
men,

For men are like the star on which at night
Thy raven eye is centred; they are firm
In friendship and in hatred. Woman's charm
Lasts but the while I see her; even then,
The while she smiles, my thoughts will often rove
To sterner ways of days that are no more.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

We men uphold each other ; eye to eye,
We know the god within us, see the best—
The trust, the faith, the restless energy
That makes us conquer while despising praise.
But women, by their very gentleness,
Their grace that charms like spirit of the grape,
Would draw us down, as draws the clinging vine
The oak's tried bough ; would make us singing
men,

Or toys, or monkeys, and, when manhood's gone,
Turn elsewhere for their pleasure, wonder-eyed.
Men were my first companions ; men have train'd
These limbs while yet they trembled ; men have
seen

What deeds I am most proud of ; men have
proved

The man within me worthy. Of a truth
I would that I were free as thou art free.
I would thou wert the king ; that I at sea
Might spend my days surrounded by such men
As never herd in cities. By the stars
I'd prick my daily course, and strive to be
As well resolved and patient as themselves,
As heedless of the smallness of the world.
Thus I would live, O Halmus ; and when came
The splendid hour of death, I'd have the storm
Sing to my soul so wild a rhapsody
That life would seem a thing to tempt a child,

PHYLLIS AND DEMOPHOON

A pastime for a woman. I would hear
The roar of waters and the seagull's scream,
The howl of winds o'er darken'd solitudes ;
Then with the men who follow'd me in fight
I'd shout the gods my coming ; and, at last,
Fearless of what might follow, drink my fill,
And drinking sink to silence and to death."
" Think not of death while yet the trumpets call
And work's to do," said Halmus. " Let us
hence !

Hear how the sea is calling ! Yonder stands—
Somewhere beyond that surge of blue and
foam—

Our marbled Athens with her arms outstretch'd,
Eager to bid thee welcome. All the stars
Are smiling now on thee, O Demophoon ;
And thou must home, while yet the wreath she
gives
Is soft and fragrant, and her praise sounds
sweet."

Then Demophoon look'd long to where uprose
Above the hoary elders of the woods
The palace of Lycurgus. " There she lies
At rest," he whisper'd, while the sailor shrugg'd
His heavy shoulders, then in silence turn'd
And walk'd apart. " O wondrous maidenhood !
Thy sister is the lily, that upon
Unrippled pools in utter silence dreams

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The long, still dreams of spotless innocence.
Beneath the sun the thing most sacred thou,
Bud of the future blossom; of the pearl
Its perfect lustre. In yon marbled pile
She sleeps, and dreams! Above our heads is
writ

The changeless destiny of human lives,
Yet gods alone can read it. She and I
Are brought together by the wayward winds,
And by the winds are parted when again
The gods decree. O Halmus, thou art right
To bid me leave before a wrong is done;
And yet—Ah, would that Troy were yet to
raze,

And Helen still to free for Menelaus;
To fight is simple; death is simple, too;
And I, a fighter and a fighter's king,
Was made for action, not for childish dreams.”
And while he ponder'd, Halmus to himself
Excused his lord. “He wavers yet,” he said,
“Who should be strong. And yet, I blame him
not.

Irresolution! Since the world began
Were men thus weak. Our better purposes
Like snowflakes show, and vanish in the air
Where love's concerned. Yet kings should
firmer be;

Should wake no hope that may not be fulfill'd,

PHYLLIS AND DEMOPHOON

And leave no broken flowers to mark their
paths."

Then turn'd the king and faced the solemn sea,
All calm now and inviting. "Let us hence,"
He said to Halmus in a voice so low
The other bent to hear it. "Let us hence
To-morrow eve. One day is all I ask
The gods to grant me. Athens, I obey!
One little day, then duty and—the night!"



UNCOMPLAINING Night, that wear-
est still

Thy weeds for him whose wide eyes seek
an East

Eternally beyond him; thou whose breath
Is fragrant as compassion, and as mild;
Whose hands are laid on all the restlessness
And woe of life, to soothe it, and assuage
The anguish of its multi-colored dreams.
What thoughts are thine when thou, in silent
robes,

Art come at last to that low ledge from whence
The world becomes a slow-unfolding scroll?
Unseen of all, in utter solitude,
The stars confined amid the mystery
That silences their voices, thou dost stand

IDYLLS OF GREECE

As one may stand whom memory makes fond,
Whose weighted lashes tell of spirit dreams
And hopes that are remember'd, though so vain.
About thy form, as clings the maiden mist
Where brood the hills, thy sheenless mantle
 clings

And hides thy body's beauty ; but thy face
Pales through thy curling tresses, dark as are
The shadows on unspeculative pools.
Thus standest thou in silence, isolate,
Above the world and yet below the skies
That hear the splendid chanting of the stars
And heed not Earth's remonstrance ; thou alone
Hast pity in thy palms, and in thine eyes
The light that makes the cradle consecrate.
And one by one beneath thy lashes pass
The day's desires, each broken-wing'd, that
 seem'd

More fair at dawn than morning's aureole ;
And deeds to startle worlds, that only prove
Endeavor futile and ambition vain.
But thou, O Night, maternal, pitiful,
Whose hopeless love for that which ever flies
Before thee, veil'd in glory, makes thee kind,
Hearest the sighs of wearied suppliants
And healest hearts that otherwise would break.
Above the world, thy world, thy hands are held
As if in benediction ; then from out

PHYLLIS AND DEMOPHOON

Each blessèd palm drips drop by blessèd drop
The dew, thy pity ; and the very grass
Is sweet with all the holiness of tears,
While trees and hills grow moist with wonder-
ment.

And when at last thou flee'st thy radiant love,
The golden Day, whose trumpeter 's the sun,
Men rise from sleep to bless thee, rise from
dreams

To brave the day and battle, knowing well
Thy hands shall soothe them at the hour of
peace.

WHILE yet the darkness veil'd one half
the world

Lycurgus enter'd softly to the room
Where Phyllis slumber'd. At her head her
nurse

Shaded the flame that flicker'd like a life
Touch'd by the breath of Death, while at her
feet,

Blinking and still, a shaggy hound kept guard.
And long he stood beside her, for he knew
(As one who years has suffer'd silently
May read the grief behind the eyes of men)
Her secret sorrow. Day by golden day
This love had blossom'd like a pallid flower
Hid from the sun ; its petals had unfurl'd

IDYLLS OF GREECE

With still insistence, and the time was near
When it must offer to the wooing air
Its beauty, and be bless'd or desolate.
But Phyllis knew not that her love was known;
Nay, knew not that she loved. Yet now in
sleep

She breathed his name, the name of Demophoon,
And darkness learnt her secrets from her sighs.
And while she sigh'd, her father gazed at her
With folded arms, and thought, perhaps, of one
Whose slumbers naught could waken. Well he
knew

A maiden's sorrow is a mother's care,
And none can help when she is call'd away.
Then bent he down and touch'd most tenderly
Her wavy hair, and left her to her dreams;
But all that night he sorrow'd, knowing well
That men are blind and gods are merciless.
For little heed the gods their handiwork
Or care how end their schemings; and at last
When, though afar, the hound had sniff'd the
dawn

And laid its muzzle in the sleeper's hand,
She woke and gazed untroubled at her nurse
And sigh'd no more, nor knew that she had
dream'd.

PHYLLIS AND DEMOPHOON

BUT ere the silv'ry treble of the birds
Proclaim'd Aurora nearing, or the skies
Were bright with rosy promise, Demophoon
Had sought a bower most dear to both of
them—

A stilly place that look'd upon the sea,
A place of fern and lilacs, odorous
As love itself. There coo'd two pretty doves
Preening their pink and pearly liveries
Unmindful of his presence. And the while
He stood amid his memories of her,
Thinking of wingèd words and stolen looks
And swift, shy touches of impassion'd hands,
She came upon him and—he yearn'd for her!
But now the Winds were waking, and they sang
The splendid Hymn of Morning; sang the
light;

The flame-faced Dawn; the marvel of the buds
Aroused from sleep along with irises
And scented things. Then Phyllis raised to
theirs

Her lovely lips, and offer'd them her hair,
For who the maid that worships not the Wind?
And where the Wind that will not play with
her?

And, standing there, they watch'd the glory
grow,

And leaping waves aspire to crystal crowns

IDYLLS OF GREECE

With eager, curling fingers; and the Winds,
With Titan trumpets fashion'd to their lips,
Blew longer blasts and louder, till the earth
In all its secret places was awake
And all the sea was echoing their song.
Then turn'd she slowly unto Demophoon
And chided him because his mouth was grave
And sorrow seemed to dwell within his eyes.
“The gods,” she said, “are good to thee and
me,

Who live amid the glory. It is good
To be alive on such a morn as this,
To be as free as is the careless bird
That wots not when its final note shall sound,
But sings, and sings. Who knows what destiny
The deathless ones apportion thee and me?
Too soon we may be voiceless! But to-day
We have our being, and a day's a life
To him who truly lives it. We may see
The things a myriad eyes no more may see;
Hear the sweet sounds that never penetrate
To Proserpine's dim gardens. Now I live,
And thank the gods for living; when I die,
If winds should blow thee here upon that
day,

Lay lilacs on my bosom, and their scent
Shall speak to me of such a morn as this!”
“And ever more shall lilacs hint of thee,”

PHYLLIS AND DEMOPHOON

Said Demophoon. "But speak thou not of
death

Amid this subtle fragrance. Blooms like these
Are Life's and Love's. The lips of goddesses
Have touch'd them ere we waken'd; and from
eyes

That soften'd as they gazed in wonderment
At each delightful cluster, blessèd tears
Have dropp'd; and still they linger, lest the sun
Should sear such utter beauty with his kiss."
And speaking thus he pluck'd a heavy spray
From off the bushes. "This shall speak," he
said,

"Of thee, sweet maiden, when the envious sea
Hints Athens and my duty. Thou wilt spend
Long mornings here amid this loveliness
While dawns for thee thy girlhood's heritage."
"Amid such utter fragrance, and such peace
As here surrounds us, Death too often lurks,"
The maiden answer'd. "In the shade of Love
He creeps, unseen of lovers; even now
His hand may reach from out the odor'd peace
And cull us to the silence. Wouldst thou go
Unsighing to the mistlands, should he call?"

"Until that moment comes I cannot say,"
Said Demophoon. "Men question not, but go
When sounds the call. How often, facing Troy,
His muffled trumpets drew my friends away

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And left me there to battle! Slaves and kings
Went without pomp to where the dark enshrouds
The lowly brow or noble; and at dawn
We only thought of Helen. For the dead
Are things of mist to us whose pulses throb
To life's sweet music while the day endures."
And Phyllis said no more, but hid her face
Amid the fragrant lilacs, lest he see
The sorrow that lay mirror'd in her eyes.
From where they stood they saw the surging
 sea,

All silv'ry now and gleaming. On its breast
The Zephyrs danced to melodies unheard
Of mortals' ears, but wildly sweet enough
To make the pale gods listen. And anon
From fields near-by a lark soar'd up and up
In measured flights with ever beating wing,
And trill'd its benediction o'er a world
Superlatively peaceful. Side by side
They linger'd, speaking seldom, while the sun
Follow'd the lark up, up, and ever up
The blue serene; for all that ever was
And all that is, however glorious,
Must follow Song and him who dares to fling
His broken notes among the gleaming stars.

AND when Lycurgus heard his guest would
 go
 That very eve, he press'd him not to stay.
 "I came," said Demophoon, "one night to rest
 Beneath thy roof; the days have come and gone,
 And still I linger. Athens calls to me,
 And I must hence to tell her of the war.
 Again I feel, as when on yonder ship
 I braved the tempest, eager and alert
 To face the gods and learn the destiny
 That's written for the morrow. In the hold
 The slaves have grown rebellious, and would
 break
 The rusted chains that clank beneath their feet.
 This morn they slew the wretch who flings them
 food,
 And broke his bones among them. I have sworn
 To set them free when once their task is done,
 And blame not their impatience. Thou art still
 Most kind to me, Lycurgus; Thrace shall be
 Remember'd in my daily sacrifice;
 But I a warrior am, with work to do,
 And dawn must find me 'compass'd by the sea."
 "Thou takest friendship with thee," said the
 king,
 "Than which the gods can grant no finer thing;
 My days are almost done. Upon my cheeks,
 As though it blew from icy solitudes,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The breeze is chill already ; and the while
I saw thee with the maiden, I did dream
That thou and she—Ah, well! the gods know
best,

And Athens calls thee. Go for thy reward.”
But while he spoke the other raised his hand
As if in protestation. “ King,” said he,
“ The empty plaudits of the gaping crowd
To thee and me are nothing. Work is all,
And faith of men. And I am one whose days
Are spent with men since boyhood. Thus I
know

Friendship, and faith, and honor ; but of love
I know not yet, nor know I that I care.

The while a voice is ringing in my ear
I listen and am happy ; but at last,
When once the voice is silent, I forget.

It was not thus in battle. Even now
I dream of shouts and clanging brass on brass,
And thudding rocks by groaning engines hurl’d
Against the buttress’d walls of smoking Troy.

Therefore I go to Athens. There I feel
Man among men ; there men ask naught of me
Except to lead them bravely in the fight
And rule with even justice. Women’s whims
Make strong men weak. I was not made for
chains,

Nor would I barter freedom for a kiss.”

PHYLLIS AND DEMOPHOON

And old Lycurgus answer'd not a word,
For well he knew youth's folly; well he knew
That men must stand upon the brink of death
To learn of life, and love; must first be old
To know youth's value and a woman's worth.
"A fair wind feed thy brightly-painted sails
And blow thee safely home," he said at last.
"And if thou e'er hast need to call a friend,
Forget not old Lycurgus. Very soon
His place shall be among the kings that fell
On Ilium's plain; his voice shall silenced be,
Or sigh as sighs the breeze among the reeds
That nod above the melancholy sea.
But while his eyes find pleasure in the sun,
And he is fit for council or for war,
Thy friend he is, and offers thee his love
As here his hand; then, take it, and—farewell!"
And Demophoon bent low, and saw him pass,
Attended, from the chamber, as a king
Whom all men honor passes. But his back
Was bow'd as with much sorrow, and his eyes
That once had braved the lightning of the
 gods
Were troubled now and fix'd upon the ground.
And all in vain his Syrian slave essay'd
To hearten him with soothing melodies
Won from a golden harp; rememb'ring now
The dream of gentle Phyllis, and the grief .

IDYLLS OF GREECE

That soon would make its home within her
heart,

His own was heavy, for he loved her well.
And when the slave had left him, and he sat
Alone beneath the purple canopy
Above his throne, he mock'd his empty lot.
For well he knew the lowly peasant knows
The joys to kings forbidden ; and the herd,
His labors done, beside his hearth can see
A daughter's eyes grow soft above her babe.

BUT Phyllis gave no sign when Demo-
phoon

Had left her in the gardens. They had
met

Beside the fountains where he first beheld
The tinted loveliness of rounded cheek
Remember'd of young Naxos, when his eyes
No more might see the sentried walls of Troy.
And though as yet he had not said a word
To tell her of his going, she had seen
That very morn the sailors on the ship
Run here and there, while Halmus scann'd the
sky

Or watch'd the palace ; and the eager slaves,
Hearing the noise of feet upon the deck,

PHYLLIS AND DEMOPHOON

Had sung the while they waited in the hold
The praise of Athens and of Demophoon.
And though the ship was far away from her
She heard the song, and hearing, hoped no more.
Then turn'd she to her slaves and bade them
bring

From carven chests of camphor-wood and fir
A purple robe that hid without restraint
Her body's beauty; and her hair they loosed
Until it fell below an ample waist
Spann'd by a silver girdle. To her feet
They bound her scented sandals, with their
thongs

White as her arching insteps, and as soft;
Then gave they her a disc of polish'd steel
With rubied handle, and therein she saw,
As in a pool the wan moon's loveliness,
Her own pale face, and knew how fair she was.
"Thou smellest of the lilac," said the slave
She favor'd most. "The fragrance of thy hair
Would make a god desirous. On thy brow
The Dawn's white fingers linger, but thy mouth
Is crimson like the tempting mouth of Love."
But Phyllis gazed upon the gleaming disc
And answer'd not. "Thy silken lashes droop
Like curtains o'er thy melancholy eyes,
And rest on cheeks of marble. Yesterday
As crimson they as this red rose I place

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Above thy heart ; but now the palest bud
That mourns a bright, inconstant butterfly
More hopeful is than thou. So fair thou art,
Sweet child of Her ! I would thou wert not
sad."

"The very gods must suffer, why not we? "
The maiden answer'd, speaking to herself
The while her eyes dream'd seaward.
"Free are the Winds to go where e'er they will.
Yet listen in the silences of night
And thou shalt hear them moaning ; and the hills
That love th' impulsive Dawn, whose iv'ry feet
'Light on their brows and then as swiftly pass,
Grow silent as the dusk descends on them,
Hushing the fragrant valleys. In the skies
Embolden'd stars step forth and disappear,
Their song unfinish'd ere the morning comes.
This rose has known a sorrow, and its scent
Is but a protest, could we understand,
Sigh'd to the gods whose ears are ever closed.
And thou and I, who serve a while or sigh
Amid the frenzied tumult known as life,
Are less than they—than wind, or hill, or star,
Less than the rose whose fragrance fills the air
The while it passes ; yet we deem us free ! "

PHYLLIS AND DEMOPHOON

AND speaking thus she pass'd with that one
slave

Down the wide marble stairway, till she came
To where the fountains play'd, while up and
down

Her peacocks strutted, scornful of the skies
And all the garden's beauties. And before
The startled birds walk'd haughtily away,
Revealing thus her presence, Demophoon
Was seen of her as thoughtfully he paced
Her fancied path. Then slipp'd the slave away,
And Phyllis call'd him in a voice so low
He heard her not until she call'd again;
And then he saw her. And without a word
He went to where she linger'd, watching him,
And bent above the fragrance of her hand.
And when he spoke his voice was as the voice
Of one who feels each minute is his last,
And fain would tell in swift, impetuous speech
A life-time's story. "Princess, I must go
Because my people call me. I am one
Whose life is theirs, is Athens'. Hapless he
Who rules to serve. The peasant or the slave
Laughs at the stars; he builds his thatched hut
Beside a brook, and, with his wife and babes,
Moves evenly through life. Watch'd by the
gods,

Imprison'd in their guarded palaces,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

With all men's burdens on their bending backs
Kings stagger to their end. From dawn till
dusk

Cold eyes take note of them, and colder hands
Berie the red within a courtier's lips.

Led men may flock together; but apart
Kings walk, and poets, crown'd in loneliness."
But Phyllis shook her head when he was done.

"I only know thou goest," she replied:

"And though thy lot is by the gods decreed
I would that I might change it to thy wish.

In other days, when other breezes blow

Soft fragrances about thee, think of one

To whom thou wert, and ever art, not king,

But Demophoon of Athens. Think of me,

When hush'd are all the brassy calls to war

That make thy spirit straighten, as a maid

Like other maids, most wistful, though her
place

And circumstance must make her seeming cold.

And though my burden other be than thine,

I shall not murmur, lest the gods deride

A grief no god can ease or understand."

And Demophoon was troubled, and his eyes

Roved to the sea, whereon his eager ship

Strain'd at its chain, as though it fain would
seek

The deeper waters ere the darkness fell.

PHYLLIS AND DEMOPHOON

For while they spoke, with eyes that look'd
away

Lest each might gaze too long, and so be lost,
The sun had sunk behind the Thracian hills,
And all the sea was purple. And the fields
Yellow with corn or green with long, lush grass
Lay strangely silent; for they knew that now
The gentle Evening soon would pass that way
And lay cool hands upon them; and the Night
Would watch them when they slumber'd, while
they dream'd.

And while the sun sank lower, darker grew
The distant skies, and darker still the waves;
And all the ships, whose snowy sails were fill'd
By truant winds, now seem'd like skimming gulls
That rose and fell, and wheel'd and veer'd again
And made the port or disappear'd to sea.
And when the dusk had hid the tell-tale blush
That warm'd her cheek, the maiden turn'd to
him,

Unfearing now her love might be betray'd,
And bade him lead her once where wound the
paths

Amid her fragrant sisters. "See!" she said;
"Each gentle bloom has closed its pretty eyes
In slumber ere thou goest. When they wake,
The winds will tell the roses thou art gone,
And they shall laugh no longer. Ere the sound

Of morning's trumpets shocks the sleeping sea,
 The tears shall lie upon their crimson cheeks;
 And though the glory shall seem dear to them,
 They still shall mourn for thee, for Demophoon.
 And while I pass, their eager thorns will strive
 To hold me prisoner, who let thee go
 Who loved them once and touch'd them tenderly."

But Demophoon made merry. "Nay," he said;
 "When once thy roses see thy perfect face
 Above their own, they will not think of me.
 But here I vow, by yon transcendent star
 So constant and so perfect, here I vow
 To tread again these fragrant paths of thine
 Before thy roses vanish, ere they go
 Where thou and I must meet when all is done."
 "Men vow so lightly; but the stars have heard,"
 The maiden whisper'd. "If thou comest not
 The reddest rose shall droop before its time;
 And when thou standest in the fields of peace
 Where silence is, and Proserpine holds sway,
 The ghosts shall scorn thee, and shall turn aside
 To leave thee lonely, thinking of thy vow."

AND thus they linger'd while the stars came
 out
 And heaven seem'd all a-fire. And now the sea,
 Restless and phosphorescent, like the flood

PHYLLIS AND DEMOPHOON

That seethes around the making of a world,
Flung on the shore vast waves that flared and
 flamed

And thunder'd once and were forever still.

“I vow to pluck thy roses ere they fade,”

Said Demophoon, the while he look'd away ;

“And if I come not, be thou sure I sleep

Beyond the sound of voices. But, behold!”—

He cried, as rent all suddenly the dark

A ruddy flame that vanished like a ghost—

“Yon signal bids me hasten. Halmus says,

In that red speech, the tide would bear us home

To Athens, and our duty. Fare thee well,

My gentle Phyllis. May the deathless gods

And brightest Fortune guard thee ; may the love

Of those thou lovest circle thee about

Like this sweet scent of lilac and of rose.

And evermore be sure of Demophoon,

Who bends before thy goodness, and would bear

No fonder recollection through his life

Than this chaste kiss he places on thy hand.”

And while she trembled, and with startled eyes

Gazed at the dark about her, he was gone—

While yet she heard the echo of his voice,

While yet her hand was hot beneath his kiss.

SO still she stood, the night-moths fear'd
Her not,
But sought, and left, their fragrant petal-loves ;
As moths and men, since erst the world began,
Have loved a while and flutter'd to the dusk.
And, one by one, behind the shelt'ring hills
The stars crept ever westward, where the sun
Had bid them follow, laughing at their love,
And luring them with brightest glances on.
And very soon the wearied slave stepp'd forth
From out the shadows where she long had hid,
And kiss'd her sandal'd feet, and kiss'd again.
But Phyllis said no word. Her gaze was fix'd
Upon the far horizon, faintly seen
As one long line that sunder'd her from him
Whose face was as a dream-face ; still she heard
His voice, his laugh, above the sobbing sea
That never sings at twilight or at dawn,
But whispers then its hopeless litany.
And when the last bright orb had left the skies,
And here and there a first faint flush appear'd
To hint the coming Dawn, from where she stood
Beneath the lilacs Phyllis held her arms
Outstretch'd to Athens. For, with light, she
saw
Her fond illusion shatter'd, and the sea
Now grey and all deserted ; and the ship
That held her love had pass'd for evermore.

BUT, one by one, the roses red and pale,
 Like thoughtless maids that love and are
 undone,

Bestow'd their subtle sweetness on the air;
 And, one by one, they droop'd their heads in
 shame

Till all their velvet beauty lay a-waste
 And all their fragrance was a thing forgot.
 And other roses bloom'd, and went the way
 Of all things fair; and soon the lilacs' scent
 Seem'd fainter than a half-remember'd dream.
 And still the sun shone, and the Winds' soft
 laugh

Was heard at dawn while all the hills were wet
 And stars were faintly gleaming. For the gods
 Take little note of things that seem to us
 Of vast concern. Our griefs and our delights
 Are naught to them, who watch in marbled calm
 From golden heights and barriers of peace
 The fretful world. The things inanimate
 To our dull comprehension, things that were
 Before we had our being—these they love;
 For trees are gentle and the stars are true,
 And oh! the perfect sympathy of hills!
 Yet gods may err. For truer than the stars
 The maid whose eyes look out upon the world
 In ever-growing wonder. In her heart
 Compassion dwells, and longing; and a trust

IDYLLS OF GREECE

That makes the warp'd thing perfect, keeps her
kind.

All's white within her, and a glory swathes,
Protectingly, her being. Thus she lives
In palaces of crystal; thus she hears
Insistent voices, faint yet ever near,
That sing their songs of promise. And, at last,
When all the glinting structure falls to earth,
And thunders wake her latent womanhood,
She rises, splendid; and nor Time nor Death
Can take from her the mem'ry of the past.
But, day by day, pale Phyllis watch'd the sea,
And paler grew ere sundown. Day by day,
She stood where once the fragrant lilacs
bloom'd,

And watch'd the line that parted her from him
Who vow'd to cull her roses ere they fell.
But well ye know the value of a vow
Made on a summer's eve, when all the air
Is warm with subtle fragrance, and the maid
Is fairer than a lily. Men have told
A moon-awaken'd passion, and forgot
Their frenzy long ere morning sober'd them.
There's not a wind that cools a fever'd mouth
More fickle than a lover, whom the dusk
Makes half-desirous, as the bee is made
Desirous of the bud at set of sun.
But Phyllis hoped, and, hoping, was as one

PHYLLIS AND DEMOPHOON

That sees the thing she longs for to her hand,
Forgetting all is shadow. Still she dream'd
Her sighs could reach to Athens, and her
prayers

Be heard above the noisy praise of men.
And, day by day, she watch'd the white-wing'd
ships

Creep slowly up from Carthage or from Tyre,
And heard the clanking menace of the chains
While on their oars the slaves pull'd wearily;
But never came the ship she knew so well,
And nevermore to her came Demophoon.

And, day by day, she paled, until at last
She watch'd for him no longer, being one
With all fair things whose little hour is done;
That question not, nor wonder; being one
With utter'd song, with roses and with dreams,
And all the sweet, slain weeds along the shore.

PAN AND PITYS



PAN AND PITYS

BESIDE a pool, a willow's width across,
Amid the forest's lush serenity
Old Pan lay sleeping. At his side his
pipes,

Dreaming, perhaps, of melodies unborn,
Lay idle, too; and all the air was soft
With drowsy harmonies and song subdued.
No noise of beasts, or forest revelry
Disturb'd the sleeper; in the boughs the birds
Perch'd lazily and silent, and the Winds
Had put aside their harps, and slumber'd, too.
For Phœbus now had reach'd that highest place
Whence curves the azure downward, and the
while

His smoking steeds raced homeward, on the earth
Turn'd his bright gaze and scorch'd it with his
pride.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

From where he kept his gleaming chariot
Upon its destined path, the glory stream'd
O'er plain and hill; it fill'd the lowly vale
And bathed the rugged mountains. But the
woods

Absorb'd the sunshine as they might the rain;
And though each aisle soon quiver'd with the
light

Ask'd more and more, and were not satisfied.

It seem'd as though in fields Olympian

The gods were met, and there had garner'd it—

This golden sunshine. And the while they sang

They look'd with love upon the gleaming world,

And, laughing loud, upheld their shining hands

And pour'd the glinting treasure on the air.

It sifted down past isolated suns,

Past all the flaming galaxies of stars

And whirling constellations, till it touch'd

Earth's airy veil, and then diffused itself

Through all the order'd channels of the world.

It swathed the bronzen beeches; and the blooms

That spent their days unnoticed in the grass

Or hid beneath the needles of the pine,

Were warm'd in their seclusion by the glow

And bless'd as were the cedars and the fir.

Unfearful of the hunter's barbèd dart

The pretty deer had sought the welcome shade

And lay a-drowse, or raised their antler'd heads

Whene'er a bird, or brown and shy-eyed hare,
 Disturb'd the silence and affrighted them.
 Thus Peace, the gentle priestess of the noon,
 Moved slowly through the forest, in her arms
 Wild roses, newly gather'd; and the air
 Was odorous and heavy with the hum
 Of vagrant insects and the scent of pines.
 But Pan slept on, unmindful of the bird
 That twitter'd on his bosom, or the hare
 That leap'd across his haunches. Did he dream
 Of dances held at moonlight, where the woods
 With softest grass were ever carpeted?
 Or did he hear the subtle harmonies
 Beyond man's hearing—plaints of falling leaves,
 The soil songs and the choruses of winds?
 Ah, ask me not; for I can only tell
 The tales I hear, and more I do not know.

AND when the steeds that coursed the arch'd
 serene
 Had toil'd perhaps an hour, there came that
 way
 From out the odor'd shade beneath the trees
 A nymph a-tiptoe. Glancing everywhere
 She braved the open, but with hand at ear
 Was wakeful ever for the faintest sound.
 Seldom to-day is seen such loveliness
 As hers, that flower'd amid those silent woods

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Along with virgin lilies. In the night
The pine's sweet fragrance and the smell of fern
And wild, wet roses made her slumber deep;
But long before the squirrels were awake
The forest heard her laughter and her song.
So slight she was, the daisies minded not
Her loit'ring foot, but each, when she had pass'd
Sprung laughing up, with eyes inquisitive,
And spied upon her beauty. White as milk
Her limbs and body; but her cheeks were touch'd
With faintest pink, as where the sun has warm'd
The tempting peach's downy excellence.
Her eyes were blue as was the pool that noon;
Her lips were scarlet, and were curved beneath
A saucy nose that match'd a thoughtless brow.
But all the white and dawn-faint pink of her
Was made more perfect by her matchless hair,
Whose wondrous red enhalo'd like a flame
The face that smiled beneath it, or was sad.
And soon from where she stood upon a mound
She saw the god asleep within the shade,
And fear'd to wake him; but the butterfly
Made no more noise than she, and so she pass'd
All unobserved to where the lazy pool
Allured the gleams of Phœbus. Then she bound
Her flaming hair in coils about her head,
And, lightly poised upon a balanced stone,
She watch'd her beauty in the moveless flood—

PAN AND PITYS

The perfect neck well-set above a breast
Where babes might some day nestle, rounded
hips

And modest knees, and small arch'd feet of her.
And when she saw how well the white of her
Was mirror'd there, and all her loveliness
Lay clear beneath, she smiled, and, kneeling
down,

Look'd closer at the face that seem'd to wear
A sunset all about it; but the skies
No bluer than her eyes were, and her lips
More scarlet seem'd than seeds of pomegranate.
And when she thus had seen how fair she was,
And noted well her ankles and her wrists
And all the lily loveliness between,
She stood erect and with protecting arms
Flash'd headlong in the water. There she swam,
Or floated idly as may float the leaf
Which summer winds with hapless piloting
Blow here and there across such tiny seas.
But soon she wearied of her aimless sport
And sought the reed-fringed edges of the pool,
And there sat down, and let the breezes dry
Her fragrant hair. And soon her glances roved
To where old Pan still dream'd, if know ye
would,

Of fickle gods aflame for willing maids,
And shepherds won by wooing goddesses.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And while she gazed, there stole across her mind
The tale a nymph had told her on a night
When, all alone, in silv'ry bliss enswathed,
The peace had led to maiden confidence.

"Pan's love art thou now Niphe is no more,"
The nymph had said. "His eyes have follow'd
thee

By day and night, although thou knowest not
His wayward wooing." Now reminded of
The idle tale, she laugh'd, yet gazed the more;
And wonder'd why the stars so constant are
While lovers vow, grow cold, and then—forget!
Then stepp'd she softly o'er the yielding grass
And lay beside him, and her breath disturb'd
The curls upon his temples, and he moved,
And, moving, sigh'd her name. Then Pitys
smiled

And pluck'd a long-stemm'd clover, and there-
with

She touch'd the god's red nostrils, touch'd again
Until he dream'd no longer, but beheld,
While slowly Sleep released him from his spell,
The gleaming nymph beside him, laughing still.
"Awake, old Pan!" she cried, and pull'd his
beard,

Then let him kiss the hand that tortured him;
"Awake! The Day is hasting to its close.
Thou knowest well how soon the hopeless Eve

PAN AND PITYS

Pursues, with lighted lamps, the flying sun
When once he hurries downward to the west
Where gentle Peace awaits him. Thou as well
Art older now and sadder than this morn ;
And yet thou sleepest, and thy pipes no more
Allure my sisters from the beeches' shade."
Then on her head the grey god laid his hand
As on a thoughtless blossom ; from his eyes
The mirth had now departed, and he gazed
A little while so steadily at her
That she at once was silenced. " Old am I,"
He said at last, the while he stroked her hair ;
" And sadden'd, too ; who have beheld these trees
Shoot starward from their cradles in the soil.
I piped their birth-song, and I danced the
while

Thy father woo'd thy mother long before.
Older am I than forests, little maid,
And I am far more weary than the hills."
" Then take thy pipes and drive thy care away
With wild, insistent music," she replied ;
" These many days thou hast not play'd for
us.

Though oft where grow the swaying reeds I
hide
And watch thee brood, aloof from merriment,
Thy pipes are ever idle ; on thy face
The shadows linger, and thou laughest not

IDYLLS OF GREECE

As was thy wont when fondest Niphe came
From out the woods and charm'd thy gloom
away.

Then be not sad, good Pan. I would that I
Might make thee smile ; play once for me, and
thou

Perchance shalt all thy weariness forget."

Then gave she him the reedy instrument,
But kiss'd it ere he placed it to his lips.

And then he blew a plaintive melody

As none may hear who lived not in the days
Of dream and of desire ; so sweet an air

As made the breezes envious, and the trees
Sway their lithe arms in utter ecstasy.

And Pitys lay, the while the old god play'd,
With chin in palm, and beat upon the grass
Her tiny toes to suit the music's time,
Biting the while the long, sweet clover stalk
As fragrant as her maiden innocence.

But now Pan's mood was changing, and he
play'd

A sadder air, an air of falling leaves
And chilly dusks, and skies that threaten men
Despite their dumb submission to the Fates.

It seem'd to Pitys that before her eyes
Pass'd Autumn in her robes of violet

And noiseless sandals. Whisp'ring to the world
The Hymn of Preparation, on the trees

PAN AND PITYS

She laid her hands and bless'd them, shriving
them

For wanton wooings with the winds of spring,
Preparing them for sleep. Upon the hills

She also linger'd, and the upland blooms

Beheld the holy beauty of her face

And closed their eyes to other loveliness.

And then he play'd a dirge funereal,

A hymn of Night and cloud-enshrouded stars,

Of stilly heights and forests fast asleep

Beneath the snows of winter. From afar

The music came, and vanish'd like the shades

Of mighty trees when hidden is the moon.

And then it seem'd to Pitys, watching him

With parted lips, that Pan grew glad again.

For now he blew a wild, unearthly strain,

A strain of wind and clouds that ever changed

In skies of gold and azure ; in her ears

The cymbals sounded of the clashing seas

When Neptune sits in splendor, or from out

The depths the Queen arises, she who is

The world's one love, white Venus, the Desired.

Then wilder grew the music, till it seem'd

Before her eyes night's stars were all a-whirl

And all the sky was flaming. And at last

With one long note that swell'd and died

away

And swell'd again, and stopp'd most suddenly,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Pan ceased, and laugh'd; then laid his pipes
aside

And Silence breathed her peace about the twain.

WHERE are ye gone, sweet melodies of old,
That charm'd the ears of pensive maiden-
hood

And made the wood nymphs listen? On the hills
Th' illusive wind still trails its wingèd feet,
And Beauty haunts the forests; but no more
In shaded glen or where the hills arise

Are heard the pipes of satyrs, or the songs
That woke the woods when pale Diana pass'd.

Above our heads the blessèd lark still sings,
And vanishes in music; and the while

We wait in breathless wonder its return

We think of ye, the first sweet melodies

That broke the glen's cool silence, and regret

The subtle music we have never heard.

Ye are no more. Perhaps in other days

When dreams return to soothe the weary world

And teach its foolish children to enjoy,

The uplands shall be waken'd in the dawn

By Pan's clear flute; the shaded dells may know

The song of wide-eyed faun. And though no
more

The joy of morn or dusk shall come to us,

And though we hope no longer, nor may yearn,

PAN AND PITYS

The far, faint echoes of the happy strain
Shall fill the air, and bless us, in our sleep.

THEN Pitys rose, and stroked the god's
rough cheeks.

"Thou pipest well, indeed, old Pan," she said;

"The air still trembles with thy melodies.

And, hark! A thrush has caught that last,
sweet note

And sings thee back thy music; and the Winds

Have laid their fitful fingers to their harps

To play when once the trilling voice is still.

So oft I've heard thee wake the sleepy woods

At twilight when the stars grow languorous

And only shepherds listen! But thy pipes

Are sweet with subtle sadness. Never now

Thou pipest of the morning, or delight,

Of loves of laughing roses. Sad art thou,

O gentle Pan, despite thy fadeless crown,

Despite thy gift of music. Tell me why?"

Then lean'd the nymph against the grey old god

And tenderly caress'd him, as against

A crumbling wall the honeysuckle leans,

Fearless and very fragrant. From the sky

The pawing steeds and flaming chariot

Of silver-sandal'd Phœbus now were gone,

Resting in coral caverns by the sea

Until the call of Morning; and the light

IDYLLS OF GREECE

That linger'd on the mountains, and upon
The voiceless woods fell still and solemnly,
Was subtly soft, as is the touch of one
That loves with holy passion. Then again,
As though no ear might hear her save her own,
Spoke gentle Pitys, and her face was turn'd
To where the first star glitter'd in the sky.

“ O Hesperus, thou that risest o'er the hills
Like silver'd priest from hidden lands of dream,
Bearing the solemn peace of sapphire seas
And gentle drowsiness in either hand,
Heed thou the praise that rises from my heart,
Hear thou the hymn that must be sweet to thee.
Behind thee treads the Evening, shadow-eyed,
Whom now we welcome. Thou her herald art,
Because thou art most fair, most pure, and
young.

The little birds cease singing when they see
Thy first faint gleam; they tell the breathless
deer

Thou shinest in the sky, where reigns the moon,
And Dian hunts no longer. Now no more
Her maidens roam the forest. Day is done.
The altar smoke is rising; in the fields
The cattle are at rest. Look down on us,
O Hesperus, gentle Even's eremite,
The while thou movest onward; dart thy rays
On Pan's grey head and mine, until the moon

PAN AND PITYS

Bathes us in soft effulgence. And at last,
When come thou art to where the pale gods sit
Beyond the noise of mortals, speak of us
As loving them, as two that fain would kneel
In amber twilight near them, and at peace.”
The while she pray’d, the grey god took his
pipes

And play’d again, a soft, illusive air
Such as suggests the wild wind in the wheat,
Or rain on shallow waters. And the moon,
Still large and golden, on the god’s curl’d locks
Stream’d silently and softly. But the hair
Of her that look’d with wide, unseeing eyes
Upon the deep’ning shadows, smoulder’d now,
As though far down amid its scented dusk
A flame were hidden, and from time to time
Lit all the depths of wavy wondrousness
That shaded well a brow so chastely white.

WHO that has heard, on such a summer’s
night,

From out the utter silences arise
The restless wind, but wonders if its sigh
May stir a nymph’s hot pulses? Who that sees
The shadows sway to fairy melody,
But wonders where the player with his flute?

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Who has not seen the uncomplaining trees
Move in their dreams, or watch'd the ghostly
dance

Of yellow'd leaves, nor felt that other eyes
Beheld with his the ancient mystery?

Who has not felt, when all the woods are still,
Upon a cheek grown pale beneath the moon
The stir of half-heard sighs, or ghostly breaths
That hint a presence hid amid the fern?
For though no more we dream the dreams of
old,

Or hear the olden voices, in our midst
The gods still linger. As of yore they watch
From viewless thrones amid the amethyst
Night follow Day, and all the incidents
That seem to us important—birth and death,
And love that makes us restless as the sea;
And when the blue serenity is won
By monstrous storm, and heaven's wide arch is
split

By horrid flame, they ride the purple clouds
And thunder their derision to the stars.
We see them not; and yet the same gods tread
The forest's needled grasses; they abide
In silent places where the bee lies faint
Above the ravish'd clover; and the while
The shadows glide beneath the silver'd trees,
And Night bends low above the sleeping world,

PAN AND PITYS

They seek the haunts that still are dear to them
And tell the tales our ears no more may hear.
The gods are with us still; and Loveliness,
Whose name is Change, although we know it not,
As once she pass'd while yet the world was
 young

From place to place moves ever silently,
That men may see the glory of her face
And strive for higher things. Upon the hills
She walks at dawn; the sunset is a smile
Upon her solemn features; and the hush
Of heavy noon, when all the pools are still,
Tells of the peace that ever circles her.

THEN Pitys took from where they idle lay
The silent pipes. "The moon has made
 me dream,
Old Pan," she said. "Blow now that I may see
The phantom things that come when music calls
On velvet nights, pale things that softly flit
Within the shadow when the dawn appears."
And once again the grey god play'd for her
A wild, low strain; a strain that seem'd to melt,
Enamor'd, in the fragrance of the dusk.
And she who lay and listen'd at his feet,
With chin in palms and elbows in the grass,
Was still and silent like a marbled thing
That wonders in the moonlight. And the while

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The mellow notes rose upward to the stars,
She watch'd the god, and in his slanted eyes
Saw that which drew her to him. Then she
rose

From out her bed of clover; and she stood
With one white arm about him, cheek to cheek,
While he blew gently on his magic pipes.

But blew no more when once she lean'd too far
And placed her lips near his. For now he
turn'd

And clasp'd the nymph, who fain had drawn
away

Had he not held her firmly. Then he spoke,
As spoke the gods when maids were yet to win
By love and wooing; and his voice was soft
As skies are soft when twilight yields to night:
“Now art thou caught, bright nymph. Yet,
fear me not,

Despite my rugged wooing. Safe art thou
In these huge arms as when thou swingest high
Above the earth thou lovest. Never yet
Has Pan despoiled the charm of maidenhood
Or made a nymph unhappy; never yet
Have list'ning fauns fled frighten'd when his
pipes

Made music in the forests.” But the child
From his embrace essay'd to free herself
And smote him—ah! how lightly—on his cheek.

PAN AND PITYS

“ Dear Pan ! ” she pleaded, “ let me go, good Pan !

I fear thee not ; for good thou art and kind.
But stern is white Diana. She may step
From out the gloom and see me. Let me go ! ”
But Pan held fast the nymph, and heeded not.
“ I love thee, maid,” he whisper’d in her ear ;
“ I love thee, Pitys ; I, who older am
Than forest Titans, love thee, with thy hair
Ruddy as primal fire. I have beheld
The northern maidens whiter than the moon,
And sloe-eyed beauties tann’d by wind and sun ;
And I have seen the face of Her whose gaze
Would blind thy gentle vision ; but, like thee
No maid have I in all my wand’rings known.”
And she, well knowing that to plead were vain,
Caress’d his cheek, but teased him with her
speech :

“ And I, old Pan, am younger than the fir
That grows by yonder pool. When I was born
The fir was half its height, and sixteen years
I watch its aspiration to the stars.
Good Pan, dear Pan, thou must not hold me
thus.

I fear the white Diana ! There may be
In yonder copse, a satyr who will tell
His fellows of thy wooing and my shame.
Then kiss me once, nay, kiss me many times

IDYLLS OF GREECE

If kiss thou wilt ; but let me go, good Pan,
Before the nymphs behold and laugh at me.”
But Pan held fast the maid in his embrace.
“ Love asks for more than kisses,” he replied ;
“ And thee I love, sweet Pity's. Mock me not,
Whose years are more, a thousand-fold, than
thine ;

For so much more I love, and so much more
Can love than one whose years, like thine, are
few.”

Thus spoke he, and was silent, holding still
The partly willing maid. No satyr yet
Had woo'd and won her from her couch of fern
Where sway'd the solemn shadows, or had made
Her pulses beat the faster with a song
That quaver'd in the moonlight and was gone.
And yet in dreams this thing had come to her,
And Eros, golden-quiver'd, in her heart
Had shot his first, swift arrow. But the one
Whose face illumed the vast domain of Night
And paled the silver splendor of the stars,
Was one whose eyes beheld the doors of Life
With eager expectation, one who smiled
At Death itself when Glory's trumpets call'd.
And him the nymph remember'd ; for the heart
Of youth seeks youth, and lips that kiss and
cling

Despite the warning thunder of the gods

PAN AND PITYS

To youth alone, that heeds nor gods nor man,
Will make surrender as the dusk descends.
“So often thou hast loved,” she said at last,
When warm she felt his breath upon her cheek,
“That thou thyself deceivest, gentle Pan.
No goddess I to win thee with a charm
Beyond maid’s comprehension. Thou hast
 piped

In stilly woods beside the knees of Her
Whom men and gods call fairest; thou hast seen
Diana’s beauties, and the Dawn has heard
Thy fond farewells, thy promises and sighs,
To more fair maids than I have ever known.
And Echo says thy promises are vain;
For, once, she was thy darling, but no more
Thou wooest her, or with thy mellow flute
Dost drive the swaying shadows from her eyes.
And Niphe, too, who died, so sing the birds,
Because thou wouldst not wed, but only love.
Thou lovest but this ruddy hair of mine,
These rounded arms far whiter than the milk
Of mountain goats; my lips, my eyes, my
 throat—

Thou lovest these, but me thou lovest not.
O fickle Pan! I beg thee let me go
That I may seek my bed amid the fern.”
But Pan knew well that women, to be won,
Must be besieged, and so held fast to her

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And pleaded further. "Thee alone I love,"
He said with lips that warm'd her crimson ear;
"With others I have dallied when the woods
Were hot at noon; and I have play'd to them
And said, perhaps, I loved them. But the gods
Take small account of whisper'd promises
Or vows of ardent lovers. Thou alone
Art she to whom the very stars would lean
To see perfection; and to thee I make
The vows that shall be lasting. Think no more
Of Echo or of Niphe. Nymphs they were
That pleased my idle moments, made me pipe
And kiss'd, perhaps, to hear me pipe again.
These many years I play the marriage songs
For gods and men. Who thinks that Pan may
love?

Who thinks that he may shun the solitude
Of these our woods, and wish that at his side
A maid might linger whom he calls his own?
But now I scent the even-tide of life,
And know that I must soon lay pipes aside
And lay me in the shadows. Therefore now,
With yet some little glow about my head,
With dreams still mine, and music and desire,
I fain would win thee, that as dusk descends
Upon thy head and mine we both may tread
The downward path together. Here I swear
I love thee, gentle Pity's. By the dusk

PAN AND PITYS

And by the clouds I swear it ; by the trees
And tiny blooms that dream amid the peace
Of these my forests. If thou wilt I'll swear
By thine own beauty, by the hair that burns
With all a sunset's glow above thy brows."
But Pitys laugh'd. "Such things must pass,"
she said ;

"The dusk is naught to swear by, nor the cloud ;
The clouds are fickle, and the dusk is gone
The while we whisper ; and the blooms that
dream

Amid this peace await a tardy bee
To profit by their fond inconstancy.
And though my hair be ruddier than flame,
A year may see it greyer than the sky
Ere heaven's bright gates are open'd. And,
methinks,

The time has been when Dian's golden locks
Seem'd fair to thee, and Echo's hair of brown ;
And who shall say, now Niphe is no more,
And willows mourn above the dust of her,
How fair to thee her raven tresses seem'd
The while thy lips were hungry for her throat?
Thy vows, O Pan, are like the vows of men—
Made to be broken and re-vow'd again."

"Then swear I by the mountains," Pan replied.
"See how they rise in purple majesty
To where the stars assemble ! On their crests

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The light falls and the shadow. They behold
The storm arise and then outwear itself;
They hear the wild Winds threaten, and the sea
Proclaim its hopeless fury; but, despite
The world's unrest, and though the gods make
war

Until the air may tremble, evermore
The solemn hills are changeless and are calm.
To-day we are; but soon the day must dawn
For thee and me—nay, watch me while I speak—
When only once our eyes shall see the sun,
When only once our lips shall sing its praise.
Love's voice must soon be silenced, and his wings
Be folded ever; but the hills shall brood
Above the crumbled sepulchres of men
And altars raised to long forgotten gods.
The hills alone stare scornfully at Time;
By them I swear, O Pitys, whom I love!"
And now the maid, half won, lean'd close to him.
"Thy speech is other than the speech of youth,
Old Pan," she said. "Thou speakest like a
god;

Like one that knows all mysteries, and is
A part of all we worship. Yesternight,
While through the boughs the moon's soft
radiance stream'd,

A shepherd knelt beside my fragrant couch
And said he loved, and bade me go with him

PAN AND PITYS

To where his dogs bay'd welcome ; but his eyes
Were not like thine, that hint of tenderness
And dreams untold because no ears invite.
And though his lips were crimson, and his voice
Was softer than the saddest of the winds,
He loved me not. His words were passionate
Because his heart was hot, desiring me
Who still am young and ruddy ; but his love
Had died at dawn had I been kind to him,
And evermore had he been cold to me."

" But I, O Pitys, who am sad and old,
Love now with all the ardor of the sun
That sinks in crimson splendor to its death,"
The god replied. " Too well it knows that soon
Night covers all, and that the pride of dawn
And youth's wild flush are things that cannot
last.

First love is dream, the second love—desire ;
The love that follows is the love that counts.
I love thee for thy beauty ; for thyself ;
I love thee for thy charm and innocence ;
I love thee as I love the daffodil
That makes the meadow perfect. Blue thine
eyes

As blue-bells in the morning, and thy mouth
More tempting is than all the crimson blooms
That scent the woods in summer. Old am I,
O gentle Pitys ; but the hearts of them

IDYLLS OF GREECE

That dream, or know much sorrow, kinder grow
As greyer turn the locks once black or gold;
But Youth is selfish, and the stars look down
In wonder, and in pity, when it loves."

AND pleading thus, nor Pan nor Pitys knew
That, peeping through the sky's far lat-
tices,

The stars beheld his wooing. For the blue
Had soften'd into purple, and the greys
And subtle tints of pearl and lavender
Had slowly vanish'd in mysterious hues
Suggesting deeps profound. The gold was
gone,

And all the brighter glory; too, were gone
The crimson, grey and wondrous opal tints
That come before the twilight; and the sky
Was soft with love, though faintly-crimson'd
clouds,

That yet beheld bright Phœbus and his car
Descending seaward, hung above the west
Like brooding doves, at peace and motionless.
But while one watch'd, the crimson seem'd to
change


To grey and black; and then the peeping stars
Aware their hour was come, stepp'd boldly
forth

To chant amid the ebon solitudes

PAN AND PITYS

The wondrous hymn of Night's ascendancy.
Beneath an oak a cricket sang its song.
A requiem for the ever-falling leaves
That know too well how merciless is Time
And how all things are transient. For the
trees

Were hoar with age before our race was young,
Were hoar with age while yet the early gods
Beheld the earth unpeopled, and evolved
From idle dreams the human mystery.
And æons hence, when men and gods are not,
And love is Death's most cherish'd memory,
The trees shall tell in whispers to the winds
Strange verses from the tragedy of life.

UT Pitys question'd still, yet evermore
Lay nestled on his bosom. "Pan," she
said,

"I would thou wert a shepherd. He might
love

And weary not of loving; thou art one
To whom each face is fairer than the last,
Because thou seest many. Who am I,
A simple nymph, to hold thee in control
When splendors find thee pleasing? When afar
The forest wantons lead thee, and thy laugh

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Dispels the solemn shadows, how shall I
Be happy or contented? I would keep
The thing I love beside me; he and I
Must watch the red and tiny pimpernel
Foretell the coming humors of the day;
Must revel in the sunshine, note the clouds
And hear the rain's soft whispers hand in hand.
If once I love, O Pan, I would be loved;
Not kiss'd and then forgotten. He must see—
This one who is, as yet, a thing of mist—
The ultimate perfection in my face,
And find what wealth of tenderness abides
Within my heart, and thus be satisfied.
I would thou wert a shepherd—one that loves
The soil and things that vanish. He is kind
Who knows that all is passing; night and day
He stays by her that loves him, tempted not
By siren voices calling him away
From where true love sits silent." But the eyes
Of Pan, that oft would twinkle like the stars
When fretful clouds are banish'd by the winds,
Were now so sad that she grew very kind
And placed her hand across them. "Tell me,
Pan;
What is this love?" she question'd. "Yester-
night,
The while the pale moon listen'd, and the moths
Above the jonquils flutter'd, in my ears

PAN AND PITYS

The shepherd whisper'd softly. Young was he,
And sad, perhaps, the while I gazed at him.
And while he spoke I thought how fair he was,
And wish'd that I could love him; for his voice
Was sometimes low and sometimes passionate,
And his was all the wondrous bloom of youth.
But thou art old, and thou art blinded now.
All things thou knowest: why Diana grieves,
Why shepherds meet white Venus in the woods,
Why I grow restless as the dusk descends,
And why so pale is fair Endymion.

What is this love, O forest melodist?

Perhaps I love; perhaps I know it not.

Perhaps thy voice, unknown to thee, may be
The voice to make me waken from my dreams,
Or dream the more." Then Pan removed her
hand

And kiss'd it once. "These things I truly
know,"

He answer'd sadly; "and, if thou wouldst hear,
Strange tales of sweet and half-forgotten things,
Long nights I might amuse thee; but of love,
Who knows the secret save the Queen thereof,
White Aphrodite? She alone can tell
By what strange alchemy the coldest heart
Becomes enamor'd, or the rose-like maid
Is drawn to him who loves her. When the gods
Bestow their gifts, 'tis best to question not

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Lest favors fail; and he that sings of love,
Or tells the world the wondrous ways thereof,
Is often one on whom the shadows fell.”
But Pitys sigh’d, as if she heard him not
And knew not of his presence: “ Could I love,
Methinks I’d tell the very stars thereof
In wingèd words, and each fond syllable
Would make a Zephyr joyous. Could I love
The forests would re-echo with my song;
The trivial brook would hear it, and would tell
The tale thereof to them that guard the seas.”
But Pan, the lover, press’d her to his breast.
“ If love were thine, O Pitys,” he replied,
“ Thine eyes alone the secret might proclaim,
But thou wouldst silent be. Though men may
boast

When love is theirs, true maids as stilly are
As birds that wait the whispers of the dawn.
Love’s silence is than speech more eloquent.
Thou art not wise, O Pitys; on thy lips
Grief has not laid her finger, and thy heart
Is stranger still to doubt and weariness.
Thou still art young; to thee the universe
A temple is of ivory and gold
Where happy dreams still linger. Long ago,
When first I piped upon the slanting hills
And wonder’d at my music, I was vain
And thought how I for evermore might sing

PAN AND PITYS

While all grew old around me. But the trees
Became each season fairer through the years,
And naught could change the mountain's love-
liness.

While I! On me the shadows now descend,
And soon, too soon, my pipes must idle lie.
And long ago I dream'd that one like thee
With constant eyes and firm untroubled mouth
Might be mine own; that I, as night drew near,
Might find one face that ever turn'd to mine
Despite the hinting whispers. She and I,
So dream'd I then, would hear the dusk's low
call

And morning's trumpets; and the skies would
flush

The while we kiss'd beneath them and were glad.
The woods should hear our laughter, and the
pools

The happy music when my pipes proclaim'd
The hour of noon and silence; she and I
Were thus to live until the wind-blown leaves
Might hide our marbled bodies from the world.
And then in yon illumined drapery
That swathes the world that was so very dear,
With bright Orion and the Pleiades,
And others made immortal, evermore
The gods would place us, ever to be seen
And ever sung by poets yet unborn.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

A dream it was, O Pity; now I know
The things 'our fancy paints may seldom be."

NOW silent were the glades of evergreen,
And silent were the lovers. All the air
Was subtly fragrant with the languid sighs
Of closing roses, thyme and heliotrope,
Of violets and jasmin; from the soil
The scent ascended slowly to the gods,
Reminding them of how the earth was fair
And willing ever to do sacrifice.
And they that gazed with unastonish'd eyes
Upon their last creation, smiled, and turn'd
To other orbs divinely glorious
Ablaze amid the sky's blue tapestry.
Across the pool, wherein the blinking stars
Were faintly mirror'd, bats skimm'd to and fro,
And tipp'd the waters with forbidding wing;
Amid the reeds the dull frog slowly croak'd
His mournful protest, and through heavy eyes
Beheld the shadows deepen. But the birds,
That love not night, were dreaming in their
nests

Amid the grass, or where the leafy boughs
With gentle lilt responded to the breeze.
Beneath the oaks the pretty deer reclined,
Unfearful of the Huntress; for at night
Diana's heart is soften'd, and the beasts

May rest until her horns awaken them.
These many years no mortal eye has seen
The Pale One and her maidens ; but when falls
The Night's soft purple o'er the woods of dream,
And glinting stars from airy palaces
Peep down in still content upon the world,
She seeks the shadow'd places. There she lies
On beds of firry fragrance, with her nymphs
In rings of tempting loveliness around.
And while the silent, lantern-bearing worm,
The forest's watchman, in the stilly aisles
Keeps lustrous watch, the gliding Hours may
see

The modest beauty with the yellow hair
And eyes so chastely azure. Could we hear
The moth's low whispers, as with ghostly wing
It wakes the honeysuckle, we might learn
Where hid she lies. But oh ! our ears are dull'd,
And dimm'd the eyes that once fair things
beheld.

All's common now, for shatter'd is the dream
That made life perfect when the air was fill'd
With splendid presences, and constant song
Fell from the heights about the heads of men.
Trees are but trees, despite the mute appeal
Of lissome arms that sway and lean to us ;
The brook no longer calls us, and the wind
The while it chants primæval symphonies

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Or wild, weird songs of forest tragedy
Is but the wind; the baser things allure—
The things that are ignoble, like ourselves.
In other days a wiser race shall note
The things we thought unworthy; men shall
hear
The forest voices and the sea's lament,
The thoughts the meadows utter while the stars
Smile down in benediction, or the rain—
The loving rain—composes hymns of peace
Alike for them that toil or are at rest.

THEN spoke grey Pan again, while Pitys
lean'd
Still closer to his bosom. "Overhead
The stars are all a-tremble, and my heart
Beats in my bosom like a captured bird.
Sweeter to me the fragrance of thy hair
Than all the wood's fair blossoms; pale thy
cheeks,
But Love's red rose still lingers on thy mouth,
And in thine eyes is longing. Dost thou hear
The gods' faint whispers as they linger near,
Unseen of thee, and tell of other loves,
And lips that now are silent as the dust?
Too well they know how little time we have
For dreams and idle plannings; therefore they
Would bid thee turn those crimson lips to mine;

Would bid thee gaze forever in the eyes
That bend o'er thine. Now speak, while yet the
moon

Has turn'd her envious glances from thy face.
I love thee, Pitys. Say thou lovest me!"
But saying naught, she placed beneath his own
Her lips, and kiss'd him. And her eyes were
soft

As round his neck she placed a scented arm
And drew his grey head downward. "Pan,"
said she,

So softly that the fond god scarcely heard,
"I know not why, and yet I worship thee.
These many months within this heart of mine
A secret love has had its hiding-place,
And thou art he who is my one desire.
Thou art my adoration. Night by night
I dream'd I saw thee piping, heard thy song,
Or watch'd thee woo a nymph whose wanton eye
Allured thine own. Then woke I, and was glad
To find I had been dreaming. Or, perhaps,
I saw thee charm Diana with thy pipe,
And win her with thy stories of the gods
Enslaved by mortal beauty. Then, dear Pan,
I hated her, and knew how much I loved.
And oft I fled to where the solitude
Assuaged my wounded spirit, but thine eyes
Pursued me there, thy music still I heard—

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Thy voice, thy mocking laughter. And there
stray'd,

One golden dawn while yet the morning star
Beheld me idly bathing in a pool,
A witless shepherd to the water's edge
Who fain had woo'd me, but I fled from him
And left him there lamenting. And again
He traced my tell-tale footprints in the grass,
And woo'd me in the shadow. Fair was he;
For youth's bright glory crown'd his pallid
brow,

And all the time he stammer'd of his love
It seem'd a harp was playing. Thee I loved,
O dear, grey Pan; and now he tells the stars
In broken speech that maids are never kind."
Then ceased the nymph; and now the heavy
moth

Was strangely audible, as on its way
To hidden feasts it vanish'd through the glade
Unconscious of the lovers or their bliss.
And though the night now compass'd them
about

Pan found her eyes and kiss'd them. "Let the
past

Be evermore forgotten," he replied;
"Love comes but once; love me, and thou shalt
learn

They love the best that know how all must pass.

PAN AND PITYS

This night beholds my wooing, when the dawn
Shall cast its gold upon thee, birds shall sing
The anthem of our nuptials. All the nymphs
That guard our scented forests shall appear
To bring thee to the altar, and the noon
Shall see thee mine forever, O my love.

Bid Phœbus haste and drive these shadows
hence,

That thou and I, with vine-leaves garlanded,
Soon meet again where stands the ivied stone
To say the vows and pour the sacred wine.
Now go thou back to where thy bed of fern
Awaits thy maiden beauty. On thine eyes
Pale Dian pour her blessings; be thy dreams
Of grey old Pan who loves thee. Thou and I
Shall have long nights for whispers; days for
deeds

And lazy noons for music and for song.
But e'er thou goest I will play for thee
The Song of Peace, that on thy lidded eyes
Soft Sleep may lay the magic of his hands
And steep thee in enchantment." Slowly then
Their arms were loosen'd; and the while she
stood

Beside her lover, to his lips he placed
The magic reed and woke it with his breath.
But gently now he blew, as though afraid
The sleeping fauns might waken, or from out

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The forest's gloom wan phantom things appear—

Harpies and Furies and unhappy ghosts.
For now the moon's pale face was almost hid
By veils of cloud, and faint, quick puffs of wind
Betoken'd storm. Had they but thought of it;
Had they but known! But Pan play'd ever on
With half-closed eyes, as though oblivious
To aught except the liquid melody
To which the trees were swaying. At his side
Stood gentle Pitys, dreaming of the dawn
And golden days to follow. Pan she saw,
And nothing else; and though Endymion,
Or fair Adonis with his burnish'd hair
And eyes wherein night's wondrous softness lay,
Had tried to win her glances, she had turn'd
Her eyes to him, her lover. Old and grey,
She loved him, deem'd him perfect. In her
heart

His face alone was treasured; in her ears
His voice would ring forever. Thus it is,
And thus it was, and thus it e'er shall be
When hearts of maids are conquer'd; men may
love,

But constancy is woman's, and the star's.
And still Pan play'd, and still the graceful trees
Bent low their swaying branches. And at last,
When all his love seem'd utter'd in a note

PAN AND PITYS

That soar'd away upon the rising wind,
Unknown to him, pale Pitys touch'd his hair
And slipp'd away ; and when, his playing done,
The grey god turn'd to where the nymph had
stood,
The gloom return'd his whisper, and his sigh.

BUT never yet, since Earth's fair daughters lured
The love of gods or shepherds, was a
maid,

So fair as she, whose eyes had fail'd to light
A passion in another. Rivalry
Love's pastime is, though rival lovers hate
And kingdoms totter while a woman smiles.
Who woos, and fears no rival, never loves.
The noble stag is jealous of his kind ;
The plumaged bird must win its chosen mate
From gaily vested suitors ; and the woods
Could tell of flowers that have their tragedies,
And insect rivalry. And long before
The gaze of Pan fell full on Pitys' face
A god had seen and loved her, one whose ways
Lay between earth and heaven, wild Boreas,
Roughest of Winds, and fear'd from Pole to
Pole.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Once only had he seen her, as she swung
In merry mood amid an alder's boughs;
But, seeing her, he loved her, and forthwith
Woo'd her with all the passion of a god
And simulated ardour. In the night
He came as comes the Zephyr, and his song
Was softer than the murmur of a harp
Touch'd by a Dream's white fingers; in the
dawn

His voice was like a trumpet; but at noon
The saddest flute was harsher than his voice,
And then he thought to win her. But in vain
This god had woo'd; in vain he sang to her
The splendors of the heavens and surging seas,
Or told her of the mysteries of stars.

"If thou wilt love me I can bear thee hence
To where the gods are," he had said to her.
"Zeus shalt thou see, the Father; thou shalt
hear

The voice of him whose thunder is the fear
Of hoary Neptune in his coral caves.
And I will show thee Juno, at whose knee
The silent Fates are seated. Thou shalt learn
The last decrees that shape the ways of men,
And bind the gods themselves. And if thou
wilt

I'll bear thee up to where white Venus sits
Upon her throne of ivory and gold

With soft, grey doves about her. Fair is she
 Beyond thy comprehension, fairer far
 Than rosy dawns in lands of utter calm,
 Fairer than snow, or than the far-flung spray.
 All this is mine to show thee; if thou wilt
 I'll bear thee hence to where the lions toss
 Their yellow manes in Libyan solitudes.
 No eyes have seen, save mine, the icy posts
 Beyond the frozen borders of the world;
 But thou shalt see the ice-wrack, hear the grind
 Of floe on floe, and ride unharm'd above
 The wastes of desolation and of snow.
 I'll bear thee forth, safe couch'd between my
 wings,
 From star to star; bright Sirius shall tell
 The untold story of unnumber'd worlds;
 Or thou shalt see huge constellations hurl'd
 From heaven's high paths. From heights
 Olympian
 I'll take thee, while strange music fills thine ears,
 To Proserpine's dim gardens; thou shalt see
 Splendors and ghostly horrors. Thou and I
 Can leave all worlds behind us if thou wilt,
 And dwell apart where gods alone may come.
 Give me thy love! The forest shall be thine,
 Sky, sun and moon, the everlasting stars,
 And all the Winds shall hail thee as their
 queen!"

IDYLLS OF GREECE

But Pitys pass'd her tresses through her hands
And shook her head. "Such things are naught
to me,"

She answer'd, and was silent. And the god
Had flown away in anger. But again
He came, and sought to win her, when the night
Lay odorous about her, and her blood
Was warm with dreams of things that might
have been.

"Boreas, I, the oldest of the Winds,"
He whisper'd, and she waken'd. "Never now
Sleep draws his velvet poppies o'er mine eyes,
O heartless nymph," he cried. "Since first I
saw

Thy ruddy hair ablaze amid the green,
And swiftly fleeing body, I have sigh'd
Or storm'd to show my passion. Let me share
Thy fragrant bed, or I no more shall sleep."
But she had mock'd, and said: "I pity thee.
But thou art ever restless. Not for thee
A bed of fern a laurel bush beside,
But such a couch as crimson'd clouds provide
Amid the constellations. For thy mate
The daughter of a goddess, one that wears
Morn's star upon her forehead, and can meet
Thy lips with all the ardor of the storm.
But I, O Wind, am but a simple nymph,
Whose pleasure is to track the brown deer down,

PAN AND PITYS

Or watch the tulips open. I can sing,
And weave the scented rushes into wreaths
For idle shepherds if they tease me not.
I care not much about the whirling stars;
They shine above me and they guide me home—
Who seeks to see them closer? I have peep'd
At pale Diana as she trod the woods,
And once I saw white Venus; but the gods
Might close my eyes if I made brave to see
The splendor of Olympus. One there is
That somewhere waits thy coming. Pitys is
No mate for thee. Then leave me, and forget
My body's whiteness and my ruddy hair,
My eyes that oft remind thee of the sea;
These things must pass, and love unstable is
That's built on body's beauty." And the

Wind

Had sought to frighten Pitys; he had swept
From west and east the slowly-moving clouds,
And made all space seem awful; in the woods
Old trees had bow'd before him, and his breath
Had bent the tender sapling to the ground.
But she had lain secure amid the fern,
And thought of Pan. And though the Wind
had sworn

To win her love, and woo'd her day by day,
She shook her head and idly pass'd her hair
Between her fingers. And the anger'd god

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Had come, had gone; had woo'd and storm'd
again,
As lovers will when maidens prove unkind
And life itself is in the one desired.

FOR many nights the jealous god had
watch'd

The maiden while she slumber'd; for the leaves
Had whisper'd of a lover, and the stars
Had smiled the while he sang her name to
them.

But no one knelt beside her fragrant bed
Except the hopeless shepherd; and the birds,
When question'd by his Zephyrs in the dawn,
Extoll'd her virtue and her constancy.
But still he doubted, for his love was strong;
And still he hated, for the leaves had said
That she was for another, not for him.
And now he knew. For he, the while he roam'd
Beneath the sky, enraged, disconsolate
And brooding o'er the fickleness of maids,
Beheld old Pan asleep beside the oak,
Beheld the pool, and her who swam therein
Light as the foam, and whiter. He beheld
The god awaken'd from his sleep, and heard
His music and his wooing. Then he knew
Why Pitys scorn'd his passion, why the stars
Made mock of him who ever sang her name

PAN AND PITYS

And made the Zephyrs praise her. And the
while

The lovers kiss'd and clung, and kiss'd again
And whisper'd to each other, and forgot
All time and danger in each other's arms,
Boreas cursed her beauty, cursed grey Pan
And cursed all things created; then he fled
To where the woods were darkest, loneliest,
And sought her path and there awaited her.

BUT, all unconscious, Pitys hurried on
Beneath the solemn cypress to the place
Where lay her bed of freshly-gather'd fern,
All cool and laurel-scented. With the dawn
The little birds would sing and waken her
And bid her call her sisters. These would come
With rosy bodies and alluring hair
And eyes a-gleam with mischief. They would
chant,

The while they slowly near'd her, hand in hand,
Clothed in their own sufficient loveliness,
The songs of Dawn and Bridal; then would
weave

Sweet grasses in her tresses. And the bed
Of fragrant fern where Sleep had watch'd by her
Through star-lit nights, would cover'd be with
sprays

Of heliotrope and ivy. Then the nymphs,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

With softer song and movements rythmical,
Would lead her slowly upward from the dell
Through glinting aisles and glades still wet
with dew

To where old Pan stood waiting. Dreaming
thus

She left the path behind her. Overhead
It darker grew and darker, while the air
Was hot and heavy, menacingly still;
And while she braved, with beating heart, the
gloom

And things that love the shadow, Boreas
With love and fury tearing at his heart
And hate of Pan to goad him, in her way
Sprang suddenly and stopp'd her. "Now," he
cried;

"Let Pan delight the shadows with his pipes
And mumble love to other nymphs than thee!
By now thou art forgotten; he has woo'd
A thousand unsubstantial images
Charm'd from the air by his own melody.
But thou to me art still the loveliest;
And though I could have slain him at my will,
He lives because I scorn, but fear him not.
Mine art thou now. Now kiss me, or this night
The lipless ghosts shall gibber in thine ears
Their welcome to the lands of Proserpine."
But she whom he address'd, with arms on breast

PAN AND PITYS

And level brows, unfearing, answer'd him :
" O Wind, I love thee not. Another maid
May be more kind. Go seek thou in the woods,
For nymphs are many, and a maid unloved
Will surely answer when thou callest her.
I love thee not. Thy face is naught to me ;
Thy voice suggests no music, and my pulse
Has never quicken'd when thou drewest near.
Dawn's flush suggests thee not; the gentle
Dusk

Has never heard the whisper of thy name
Tell the far star the yearning of my heart.
I love thee not, O Wind. Now let me pass,
Or on thy head the wrath of gods descend !"
But he dismay'd the silence of the woods
With scornful laughter, long and terrible.
" The gods and I are equals," he replied ;
" So threaten not. For I am Boreas,
Astræus' son. If angrily I breathe,
The forest bends before me. Who art thou
To say thou wilt not love me? With the wings
That bear me to the presence of the gods
I strike but once, and level lies the oak
That tower'd to the stars for centuries ;
And thou art but a nymph, a butterfly
That makes a day seem perfect, and is gone.
I constant am. Pan woos a thousand maids ;
His love is like his music, born to die."

IDYLLS OF GREECE

“Thou, constant!” Pitys answer’d. “In the
dawn

Thou blowest here; at noon thou blowest there;
At night thy place is vacant. Who art thou
To call another fickle? In the woods
The trees and saplings fear thee; on the seas
Men dread thy changeful temper; in the skies
Diana veils her face for scorn of thee.

A nymph am I, no goddess. But my song
Has made the linnet listen, and at dusk
The squirrel sits, unfearing, in my path,
And fauns will lie beside me. Pan has said
My voice is sweeter than the sweetest flute
That wakes the hills in summer; he has said
My lips are softer than the velvet rose
That languishes at even. Pan I love,
Because to him I am no butterfly
That makes a day seem perfect; thee I hate.
Now let me pass before I cry for aid!”

But now he sprang upon her, mad with rage
Because she would not heed him. “Once
again,”

He mutter’d hoarsely, as he held her fast,
“I bid thee love me, leaving hateful Pan.
Still young art thou, and life should yet be
sweet

To one whose day is hardly yet begun.
Come hence with me; less old am I than Pan.

PAN AND PITYS

The dawn shall find thee standing by the gates
Whence issues all the glory ; thou and I
Will follow splendor on its daily course
And sleep where hides the sunset. Æons hence,
When all is over and our dream is done,
Of thee and me unhappy men shall sing
And envy us our kisses." But, again,
She strove to keep him from her. " Pan I love,"
She murmur'd faintly ; " Pan alone I love ;
And lacking Pan I will most gladly die."
" Then look thy last on life," the god replied.
" Behold the stars, the gently-swaying trees,
The little blooms that dream beneath thy feet.
For, if thou wilt not kiss me as I ask,
Be sure these trees no more shall greet thine
eyes
When morning gilds the heavens. Eterne the
night
In Proserpine's dim gardens. Kiss thou me ;
And say that me thou lovest." And again
She call'd on Pan, till all the sleeping woods
Were almost waken'd ; and the while she cried,
The hateful god press'd tight his iron hand
Upon the crimson bow that was her mouth,
And held it there until she strove no more.
And hating still, he hurl'd the tender corse
Against a rock, and left it. Then the trees
Sway'd tenderly above her, and the stars



IDYLLS OF GREECE

Look'd down in utter pity from the skies
At her whose dream was over. From the dusk
A glow-worm came to light her ghost's slow steps,
Down to the voiceless waters. For the trees
Are quick with feeling in the greater things
Like love and death; there is no sympathy
More touching than the sympathy of stars
That watch yet cannot help us; and the midge
That drones its thin lament in human ears
Reminds us of its wing'd relationship.
In bye-gone years these things were understood,
In bye-gone years, when man was innocent,
He stood a little closer to the gods
And, knowing less, was wiser then than now.

YE would not bid me tell how Morning came
In cool grey robes along that flower-strewn
path
And closed those eyes forever? Let them gaze,
A little while upon the holy Night,
Upon the gentle brotherhood of trees,
Cowl'd moths and things of silence. In the
woods
Let Pan be ever waiting with his pipes
Unconscious of the slaying of his love.
In lands of dream wild ivy ever clings
About uncrumbling altars; in the glades
The shy deer slumber, and the heliotrope

PAN AND PITYS

Shall scent the dusk forever. Bide we there
Along with shadow lest too soon we break
The fond illusion. Pan shall pipe for us
The tunes he play'd for Pitys; he shall watch
With slanting eyes the golden forest aisles
And turn his ear to catch the first faint song
That tells his darling's coming through the
woods.

A little while and we might even see
The Zephyrs lift the poplars' silver'd leaves
To hide her virgin beauty from the sun;
But now she lies in silent wistfulness,
A thing to dream of, pale and consecrate,
Amid the shadows, till the moon steps forth
To kiss her once. Ah, let us leave her thus
Amid the silent pity of the trees
Until for us she is a memory
Of something dear; of something that is sweet
As half-remember'd music, or the sound
Of cherish'd voices, still'd, but unforget.
Regret is vain; all things must have an end.
Or soon or late the laughter dies away,
And man and maid are gather'd to the dusk
Where nothing is but breathless quietude.
Let Pan be waiting; things that might have
been
Enslave our fancy—for the dream is all!

PRAXIS AND NARCISSUS



PRAXIS AND NARCISSUS

WHAT is the thing most prized?" I
ask'd the Night,
The while along the highways of the
skies

The early stars lit dreamily their lamps
Amid the pregnant silence. All alone
I lay and mused of bye-gone tragedies,
Of loves and ardent lovers; and the hills
Loom'd faintly in the distance. Not a breeze
Assail'd the holy stillness; not a bird
Beat wing against the unillumined air
Or thrill'd the pensive shadows. Then from out
The scented dusk, wherein unseen of us
She hides and sees through eyes compassionate
The sleep that ends the iron toil of men,
Night whisper'd: "Youth; and then the dreams
thereof."

IDYLLS OF GREECE

ONCE on a time, in days when men still trod
Earth's paths in breathless wonder, and the
world

Roll'd all a-glister through the firmament
Where sat the gods and praised its loveliness,
Amid the solemn woods of Attica

A wearied nymph lay sleeping in the shade.

For now it was the moment when the sun

Stood highest in the azure, and his rays

Pour'd hotly like a stream of molten gold

On woods and hills alike, on plains and sea.

The weighty cedars and the fragrant pines,

The copper-color'd beeches and the oaks,

And all the lesser trees were motionless

In this one moment. Often they had sway'd

Their arms in wild abandon, when the wind

Set all the woods a-dancing to the hymns

That made the satyrs joyous. Now they
dream'd

Amid the peace, the sunshine; for the trees

Remember much of forest tragedy

And wondrous forest doings. They have heard

The rain songs and the wind songs; they have
seen

Their sisters slain by unrelenting storms,

Or slaughter'd by the woodmen. Therefore
they,

Whose fragrant hearts are soft with sympathy,

PRAXIS AND NARCISSUS

Whose whisp'ring leaves would tell us of their
love,

Can dream their dreams in noons of sultriness
Or when the gloom of winter wraps them round.
Within the glade, where now the sleeping maid
Lay still, as if enchanted, nothing proved
That this was not an unsubstantial dream
Created but to vanish. Nothing stirr'd,
Or broke the utter silence. In the dawn
The birds had sung wild anthems; then appear'd
The gaudy host of wing'd ambassadors
To courts of voiceless beauty, and the bee
That sips and sings and leaves its love forlorn.
And soon would come the undecided moth
That loves the dusk; then owls, whose hoots
foretell

The shuffling Midnight, cowl'd and passionless.
But now the sunlight stream'd upon a glade
Of quietude unbroken; by the pools
The dragon-flies were gather'd, and the fields
Had lured the bee and thoughtless butterfly
With clover feasts and fragrant eglantine.
And soon there came from out the needled aisles
Another nymph a-tiptoe, hesitant,
With bended arm and finger on her lip,
And head inclined to catch the faintest sound.
About her form a wealth of glinting hair
Fell veil-like, all a-shimmer; for the sun

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Delights in adding glory to the things
Already fair and golden, as the moon
Gives her chaste kisses to the things of night.
Beloved was she of both, of sun and moon;
For she, in such a ring of laughing girls
As, holding hands, step lightly round and round
On flower-embroider'd meadows, had been call'd
The loveliest, and worn upon her brows
A crown of woven daisies. Softly now,
From tree to tree and berried bush to bush,
She glided like a shadow; and at last,
While yet the sun was high above the glade
And everywhere was silence, in the shade
Beneath the beech beheld the sleeping nymph.
Then stood she still. But she that slept awoke
Despite the other's caution. Sitting up,
She saw her laughing sister. "Come," she
cried,

"My fond and teasing Thya! In my dreams
I saw thee steal a-tiptoe through the woods,
And wonder'd if to wake and hide from thee,
Or linger here, would please thy mood the most.
For though thou treadest lightly, like a Wind
Above the graves of Autumn's gather'd leaves,
I heard thy step, and woke to welcome thee
And bid thee tell what thou hast heard or seen."
Then Thya cross'd to where her sister lay,
And knelt beside her. On her maidenhood

PRAXIS AND NARCISSUS

The sun had smiled but sixteen happy years,
While happiness abode within her eyes
And made their blue delicious. She had bound
Around her brows a creeper, scarlet-leaved,
That lost itself amid her yellow hair
Like crimson poppies in a field of corn;
And all the gentle loveliness of her
Was sweet and fragrant like the woods at dawn.
“I know by now each hiding place of thine,
Belovèd Praxis,” she replied at last,
When, kneeling in the shadow, she essay’d
To fan away her sister’s drowsiness.
“I know the little hollow where the fern
Conceals the startled rabbit; I have seen
The stalwart bough that bears thy added weight
With all its ruddy apples; and the pool
With all the oaks around it, whereto comes
At night the pale Narcissus, loveliest
And loneliest of youths. Each haunt of thine
I know by now, dear Praxis; but to-day
I found thee not in haunts of other times—
The reason give, or I will fan no more!”
But Praxis grasp’d her sister’s slender arm
And drew her to her bosom. “Ask the wind,”
She answer’d softly as she kiss’d the child,
“Why west it blows to-day, when yester-eve
It bore its fragrant greeting to the east.
The drift that flutters idly down the breeze

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Goes here or there ; and I, to this cool spot
Was led by Chance, who led thee here to me.
But tell me now the gossip of the woods ;
What nymph has left the spotless sisterhood
Of pitiless Diana? Who is she
That's woo'd of Pan now Pitys is no more?
What hast thou learnt of insect and of bird,
And snow-poll'd dandelion? Little ears
Have heard the strangest secrets ; Praxis waits,
Who oft rewards thy stories with a kiss."

THEN Thya told the pleasant chronicle
Of woodland doings ; of the doe that
mourn'd

Diana's morning victim ; of the dove
Discover'd as she sat upon her nest
Unmindful of the peeper. Then she told
How, ere the morn was golden, there had come
To where she slept a shepherd, who had woo'd
With all a shepherd's passion. " But," said
she,

" I told him, gentle Praxis, of the bee
That loves and woos the clover, and is gone ;
And then I fled, and he, pursuing me,
Fell headlong in a pool, whereat I laugh'd.
And then I met Dictynna, who, they say,
Would disobey Diana, following
A wild-eyed wooer ; but she fears the Queen,

PRAXIS AND NARCISSUS

And meets her lover when the thrush is still.
And her I fain had question'd, had I dared,
What is this love that makes men's voices soft,
And maids to blush like poppies. Knowest thou,
O dark-eyed Praxis? " But the elder nymph
Was playing now with Thya's golden hair,
And shook her head demurely. "Naught I
know,"

She answer'd softly, " save thy words are like
The brook's sweet babble. Therefore tell me
more."

BUT Thya paused before she told again
The things that seem'd to her of consequence.

" This love," she said, " I would I knew of it;
For I am weary of the butterfly,
And weary of the squirrel. Ere I sleep
I hear the breezes whisper of delight
Unknown to maids like me; and when the moon
In yonder skies lies palely indolent,
With stars about her, on my leafy bed
She seems to gaze in pity. All alone
I watch the shadows swaying in the gloom,
And no one bids me wake to greet the dawn."
" Thou sleepest well, my Thya," Praxis said,
And stroked her sister's tresses. " Thank the
gods

IDYLLS OF GREECE

That dreams are thy companions. They that
love

Too often fear the coming of the morn,
And watch the sunset with an aching heart.
To thee the gods are gentle. Thou art yet
The one the winds love; and the hornèd moon,
Who numbers thee among the things of pearl,
Beholds thy virgin beauty with delight.
The hills are thine, the valley; thou canst go
Where'er thy wild feet lead thee. Free art
thou,

Because thou lovest not, and art not loved;
And being free art happy as the cloud
That roams among the palaces of gods."
But Thya shook her head. "Thou knowest
not,

O gentle Praxis of the shadow'd eyes,
My wants and all my yearnings. Therefore I
Will ask thee no more questions, but will tell
How Pan appear'd and drove us twain apart.
Around his head were grape and ivy leaves;
His mouth and beard were winey; and his face
Was redder than the sunset. Like a goat
He danced before Dictynna, seeming grave
The while he balanced on his cloven hoofs;
And then would laugh, when, tripp'd by tangled
roots,

He sprawl'd in drunken ease upon the grass.

PRAXIS AND NARCISSUS

But when he rose his mood again had changed,
And me he caught and kiss'd upon the mouth;
And fain had kiss'd again, but from his arms
I slipp'd and fled, and found Dictynna gone.

Then roam'd I through the slowly-warming
woods;

For now the sun was high, and through the
aisles

His golden glances darted; and the nymphs
Had sought, like thee, a shady resting place.

But when at last I near'd thy favor'd pool
That smiles amid its nodding daffodils,
I heard the sound of weeping. From a bush

Of crimson rhododendron, bosom-high,
Dark-leaf'd and like a thicket, then I peer'd
And saw—whom guessest thou? Dictynna?

Nay,

Sweet Echo! And—I wish'd myself away.

For, after thee, dear sister, Echo is
The one I think I most would like to be.

I often play that I have dove-grey eyes
And hair like hers, so silken, and as brown
As polish'd chestnuts. Once she smiled at me;
And ever since I watch her from afar,
As from afar a star that loves the moon
May watch a thing so perfect, and be glad.
They say she loves. They say these many
months

IDYLLS OF GREECE

She shuns the sound of laughter, and alone
Roams here and there among the silent trees,
But never tells her secret. Fain had I
Crept close and said: 'Sweet Echo, it is I,
Thy friend, the little Thya. Tell to me
The cause of all thy sorrow. Grief that's told
Is grief divided, and the lighter made.'
Perhaps Diana could have solaced her,
Or thou, dear Praxis; but my years are few,
And I might wound while meaning to be kind.
And so I blew a kiss to where she lay,
And crept away as softly as I came.
Now all the woods seem sadder than at dawn,
And I am most unhappy." Then no more
She spoke, but laid her gold-encircled head
Upon her sister's bosom. Thus at last
The busy brook that gossips through the woods
And patient meads is silenced; finding peace
When gather'd to the comprehending sea
Or to the sky's unmarr'd serenity.

BUT now the sun beheld his rested love
With sidelong glances, and the woods again
Became a temple, where the gather'd birds—
The thrush, the wren, the linnet, and the dove—
Piped softer songs than human melodist
E'er chanted in the sunshine; and afar
The risen lark above the scented fields

PRAXIS AND NARCISSUS

Trill'd silv'ry benediction. Then were heard
The distant horns that told the wide-eyed deer
Diana had awaken'd, and would soon
With hounds and laughing maidens give them
chase.

And now the nymphs made ready to depart.
"I tend Diana till the moon steps forth,"
Said Praxis to her sister. "Go thou now,
My little Thya, and forget thy care
Amid the forest's beauty. Weave for me
A wreath of wild, sweet roses, and to-night
I'll wear it while I tell thee of the sea,
Where mermen dwell in caves of gleaming pearl.
Now smilest thou already! With a kiss
I send thee forth, my sister. Hear the horns
Wind louder now and nearer! I must haste
And meet the forest's Mistress; but To-night
Will come at last, and thou shalt kiss me back
And tell me of my promise! Thus I press
My little Thya, who the gentlest is
Of all the gentle nymphs in Attica."

BUT Echo still sat weeping by the pool,
Disconsolate and hopeless. Far apart
From all her laughing sisters she re-
main'd,

As though an outcast, lovely yet despised.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

For many years the clear-voiced leader she
Of nymphs whose singing usher'd in the Day
Or told the Night's advancement. She had
sung,

To please great Zeus, of things the wood-folk do
When silly shepherds woo them. Fairest she
Of all fair nymphs ; but now, how sad the lot
Of her whom he had favor'd, and had loved !
That self-same morn, while yet the dew lay cool
Upon the ferns' chaste beauty, she had spied
Immortal Zeus asleep beside a nymph,
Their arms enmesh'd together. On his breast
Her face lay hid, and all the white of her
Was veil'd beneath his purple. Thus they slept,
Yet sigh'd and call'd each other to return
From lands of sleep, to whisper and to kiss
And tell their dreams together while they might.
For ye that love know well how pitiless
Is Time, how unrelenting. While ye rest
'Twixt kiss and kiss, and while with heavy lids
Ye wait endearment's coining of the word
That proves undying passion, Time moves on,
And nevermore are ye what once ye were.
To-day is yours ; the night is yours in part—
Sleep envies ye your kisses and your sighs.
To-morrow? Ah! What word, excepting Death,
So sad is as To-morrow? Say it not.
Who counts upon To-morrow grasps the wind.

AND while they slept, and while their lips
still moved

Above the words their ears no more might hear,
Pale Echo watch'd the twain, and ask'd herself
Who she might be that from Olympus drew
The gods' dread king, and charm'd him with a
kiss.

Then stepp'd she close to where they sighing
lay,

And lightly, as the wind may lift a leaf
That hides the gauzy insect from the sun,
She raised the purple mantle; and the face
That rested there so fair was, yet so sad,
She drew away ashamed, yet envious.

And while the nymphs were group'd around the
pool

Wherein they bathed each morning, she had
told

This secret thing, and all the nymphs had
laugh'd

Until on high Olympus Juno heard
Above the breathless silence of the dawn.

And, bending, she had listen'd. One by one
The nymphs re-told the story, till her brow
Was anger-lined and awful; then she bade
The thunders roar her coming, and the while
The bright air quiver'd and the birds forsook
Their nests in utter terror, she appear'd

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Amid the nymphs and stared them cold as stone.
And one by one they drew themselves away
From hapless Echo, who was kneeling now
With cover'd face among the daffodils.

Then Juno spoke, the cold and pitiless,
Unloved of Zeus and fear'd of all the gods
On bright Olympus ; and her voice was like
The wind that drives with angry hiss the spray
From seas of writhing turmoil. "Thou hast
seen

The hateful thing, the deed of shame," she
said,

And stretch'd her hand above pale Echo's head ;
"And, minding not mine honor, thou hast told
Winds, trees and birds, and mocking nymphs
thereof,

That they who sit by mighty Zeus may laugh,
And men deride the weakness of a god.

This having seen and evermore forgot
I might have made thee goddess, lifted thee
To sit with us in splendor ; now thou art
Abhorr'd of me, and loved no more of Zeus.
Wherefore I raise my hands above thy head
And take from thee sweet speech, sweet speech
that is

Illusive Music's sister. Nevermore
Thy tongue shall trill the love-song ; nevermore
Thy lips shall form the unforgotten words

PRAXIS AND NARCISSUS

Of whisper'd love at twilight. Shouldst thou
wed,

Thy babe shall miss an answer to its coo,
Nor shalt thou ever croon its slumber song.
But lest with utter silence there should come
Forgetfulness of sorrow, thou shalt be
A mirror for men's voices, casting back
The pleasant sound although thyself unseen.
Now go thou forth, false Echo. 'Till the winds
And singing sea be silenced, and the stars
No longer burn above thee, wander thou,
That men may learn the enmity of gods
To them that dare reveal their mysteries."
Thus spoke the anger'd goddess. And the
clouds

Descended slowly till they cover'd her
And hid her from the glances of the nymphs;
Then rose she up in silence, solemnly,
Above the laurels, pines, and pass'd away
Amid the blue to brood upon her throne
And shun the eyes of them that mock'd at her.
Then, one by one, the nymphs forsook the pool
And left among the flowers that pitied her
The silent Echo; saying naught they turn'd,
And saying naught they slowly disappear'd,
As turn the favor'd from the downcast thing
'And shun the hopeless and unfortunate.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

THUS Thya found her, and had left her
there,

Alone, with sorrow for companionship.

But while she wept, she dream'd that one would
come

To comfort her when once the nymphs had told
The woods of her misfortune. In her heart
Hope linger'd still—fond Hope, that ever bides
Though Night dismays the troubled soul of
men ;

And so she dream'd, and dreaming seem'd to feel
Compassion's fingers laid upon her brows.

For many months the hapless nymph had loved
The shy Narcissus, and had follow'd him

On tangled paths where'er his footsteps led ;

But ever had the youth eluded her,

Or treated her advances with disdain.

For though all nymphs had ever dream'd of him,

And Venus, the Immortal, call'd him fair,

Narcissus eyed them coldly, finding not

In aught that sigh'd and whisper'd when he
pass'd

The charm that binds a lover to his maid.

Some said he woo'd a nymph who loved him not,

And others call'd him enemy to love ;

And said that he, on noons of lassitude,

Would sit beside some sky-reflecting pool

To watch his own fair features. This he did ;

PRAXIS AND NARCISSUS

But saw the while the beauty of the sky ;
Or thought of one, a sister, who was dead,
Or fleeting clouds above him ; asking them
Why he was fetter'd while the bird was free,
And why the gods had fashion'd him at all.
And while the nymphs had slowly drawn away
Beguiled, perhaps, by shepherds or a god,
Two loved the youth most fondly ; Echo, one,
And—Praxis, though none knew it, leastwise she
Whose love must now be evermore untold.
And Echo now felt sure that to his eyes
Would well the tears of pity when he saw
Her adoration, now made doubly mute.
But naught she knew of youth, the pitiless,
And naught of love ; for love is like the rain
That comes unbidden from the grieving skies
When earth is parch'd and weary. On the weed
It falls, as on the rose ; and nourishes
The meadow and the wilderness alike.
But who has bade it fall to suit his whim,
And who has made Love minister to him ?
So Echo sigh'd, and waited by the pool.
For well she knew that he whom she desired
Would come that way to rest a while and dream,
And bathe his body's beauty. In the woods
No spot there was so shelter'd ; none so dear
To stricken stag, that drank, the while it gazed
Upon its soft, reflected counterfeit,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And wonder'd, ere it crept away to death,
How aught could wound a thing so innocent.
There came as well the wide-eyed, anxious doe
Beside its faun, alert to ev'ry sound
That hinted danger; and the startled hare
There quench'd its thirst and vanish'd like a
monk

Amid the cloistral silence of the trees.

AND while amid the upright daffodils
And scented dusk pale Echo stood and
dream'd,

From out the forest's darkness he appear'd—
The weary-eyed Narcissus. White his limbs
As coldest coral that in sunless caves
Lies hid beneath the blossoms of the sea.
About his brows was bound an ivy wreath,
Whose clinging leaves confined such ebon locks
As Sleep may shake above a drowsy child
The while he woos it to untroubled dreams.
And suddenly she saw him, and arose
And stood abash'd before him. Ere he came
She told herself that she, with outstretch'd arms,
Would face him kneeling; that her eyes might
plead

The while her lips were silent; now, dismay'd,
She stood before him like a dazzled moth
Before a sudden glory. And the thought

PRAXIS AND NARCISSUS

Of utter dumbness made her weep again
And hide her face behind her trembling hands.
But he that stood and watch'd her, like a god
In wondrous calm and beauty, knew too well
Who thus had hid her features. "Thou," he
cried,

"Art she on whom the steadfast stars shall gaze
In soft compassion. Echo is thy name;
Thy fault, the telling of the loves of Zeus;
And she who hates thee Juno is, who sits
Beside him on Olympus. Even now
The nymphs have told thy sorrow, and the trees
Are bow'd above the soil for love of thee.
Echo art thou, of whom strange men shall sing
When we have pass'd to where the shadows bide
And Love itself is voiceless." Slowly then
She bared her face's beauty, and outheld
Her arms to him whose voice was as the wind
On morns of blue and silver. Silent now
She stood before him, and the gods were touch'd
To see the mute appeal upon her lips
And all the unvoiced yearning of her arms.
But he whom she would win was silent, too.
He came no nearer; and, although his eyes
Were moist with pity, yet he loved her not,
And answer'd not, until from out the glow
A pigeon flutter'd, and upon the snow
Of Echo's shoulder found a resting place.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

“ Our Venus loves thee, Echo,” he began ;
“ Despite thy fault, the Queen is merciful
And braves the wrath of Juno and of Zeus.
She sends thee now her gentle messenger
To bid thee hope. Who knows but one may
 come
To ask thy love——” But suddenly she turn’d,
And with a sigh as awful as a stab,
So sharp, so short it was, she turn’d and fled,
And left Narcissus standing there, amazed.

AND well she knew that day was done for
her ;
That nevermore the glances of the sun
Might warm her cheeks, or Zephyrs in the morn
Be wanton with her tresses. Never once
She linger’d ’neath the beeches, or essay’d
To hear pursuing foot-falls through the fern ;
But sped, by shaded paths unfrequented,
Beyond the borderline of Attica,
To other woods wherein no memories
Might make the day more tragic than the night.
And there grew old. And shepherds told the
 tale
How oft they saw, the while their woolly flocks
Were grazing near the woodlands, one who
 seem’d
Less nymph than fleeing spirit. Never yet

PRAXIS AND NARCISSUS

Was satyr seen beside her. All alone,
Save for the fauns that sometimes follow'd her,
She came and went, but often gazed at them
With eyes that seem'd unutterably sad.
And this the shepherds noted; that when came
To these same woods Diana and her maids,
Or wand'ring Pan behind his fitful pipes,
The nymph was seen no longer. Where she hid
No shepherd knew; and one who watch'd the
woods

From noon until the hopeless moon appear'd,
And through the dark until Morn's crimson
torch

Enflamed the East, had seen no sign of her.
But when no more the silv'ry voices broke
The forest's soft solemnity, again
The simple shepherds, as they watch'd their
sheep,


Beheld afar the ever-silent nymph.
And once, when somewhat nearer she had come
To where they idled, one arose and sang
A song that throb'd with passion, such a song
As sing the swains when love is yet to win
And skies are bright with splendid presences.
And lo! before the tear-compelling sound
Had left the lips of him that utter'd it,
And while the glow still burn'd upon his face,
A voice was heard in answer, like a sigh

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Of troubled winds, when down the aisles of Time
Love's song reminds of things that might have
been.

And they that heard were startled; and again
When one had shock'd the fragrant silences
With one clear call of wonder, she replied
With faint precision. Then the shepherds knew
That this was Echo, whom the gods made mute
Till human voice might rouse her. And again
On nights of peace, or when their hearts were
fill'd

With all the golden joyousness of morn,
They call'd her as the shepherd calls to-day,
And, wooingly, she answer'd from afar.
For though the gods be obdurate and stern,
And merciless to them that anger them,
Compassion warms the hearts of humble men;
Their pity proves the virtue of the poor.

OW light was slowly waning in the west,
And Evening, in her robes of lavender,
One star upon her brow, stepp'd from
the skies

And laid upon the forests and the hills
Cool hands of benediction. One by one
The cowslips closed, as if afraid to see

PRAXIS AND NARCISSUS

Night's sombre tragedies; and soon the woods
Were still and silent save when through the dusk
The ebon bat skim'd swiftly, or the dove
Coo'd from its high and leafy hermitage.
Beneath the trees the deer had laid them down,
Their shy calls answer'd by their constant mates.
Scarce seen upon the needles of the pines
They rested now, and gazed with lustrous eyes
Of soft content upon the purpling glades;
Or sometimes moved to where the cooler fern
Was soft and fragrant, and awaited there
Night with her silver mirror, and the stars.
It was the hour of peace. Along the hills
The sombre shades advanced, dislodging thence
The glow that linger'd on the stony crests
Like love upon the foreheads of the old;
But o'er the lowly meadows, where the stream
Murmur'd its song and hurried to the sea,
The fleecy mist was falling like a veil
To hide each petal'd beauty till the dawn.
And over all the gods sat silently,
Watching the world through heavy eyes of
dream,
Magnificently solemn. They beheld
Forest and field and gently rising hill,
Joying therein in ways unknown to us
Who find more beauty in a painted face
Than in the wholesome features of the world.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And as they gazed, Apollo play'd for them
Hymns of the dusk, low-noted vagaries
Suggesting peace and quiet. On his knee
He knelt by her whose glances swell the seeds
And tint the blossoms, Ceres, she whom men
Have call'd the fair Earth Mother; and her
eyes

Were softer than his music, soft as is
The mother's gaze when first she sees her babe
With wonder yet about it. Now she saw
The patient cattle in the drowsy fields,
The sheep within the sheepfold, and the hut
Wherein the happy shepherd and his mate
Whisper'd above the embers. Woods and plains
And mountains lay beneath her; and the while
Apollo touch'd his vibrant instrument
And, one by one, allured the modest stars
From where they waited whisp'ring, she beheld
The gentle-eyed and velvet-sandal'd Dusk
Enswathe the world in her benign caress.

THE little Thya was no sooner hid
When from the shadow of the ancient beech
Praxis arose, now rested and alert,
And left the glade wherein now softly gleam'd
The setting sun. As pass before our eyes
Our noiseless dreams and leave no mark behind
Of fleeing feet, so pass'd she through the aisles,

PRAXIS AND NARCISSUS

Light as a moth. Rememb'ring now where
stood

An ancient altar, grey and ivy-deck'd,
Where men to Venus sacrifices made,
She hasten'd there, and, kneeling, laid thereon
A tress of hair that gleam'd like fine-spun gold
Touch'd by Apollo's fingers. "Take," cried
she,

And slowly lifted to the heights serene
Her arms' appealing, column'd loveliness,
"O take, bright Goddess, what I prize the most,
And grant me love! Each night I dream of
one

Whose beauty is my anguish; and at dawn
Aurora's glow reminds me of his hair.
Throughout the day his face upon the air
In softest tints is painted, and at night
It trembles through the darkness like a flame.
These many months I tread, disconsolate,
The paths whereon I once danced joyously,
Heedless the while of Eros; now no more
The winds suggest the melodies of Spring
Or set my pulses throbbing. All alone
I wander in my whiteness, and my sighs
Have won compassion from the mocking fauns
And made the iris watch me as I pass."
Then paused she, and, where trembled still the
tress

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Of sever'd hair, all golden, placed her hands ;
Then upward gazed, and listen'd. But the air
Hung silently about her. If she heard,
The Goddess made no answer ; sent no sign
By dove or wingèd Zephyr down the blue
To her that knelt in maiden wistfulness
And waited, watch'd and wonder'd. And again
The golden peace was shatter'd by her voice,
And once again the beeches heard her sigh.
But now it seem'd she murmur'd to herself
And not to Venus ; and her eyes no more
Sought the bright blue above her, but beheld
The paler beauties starr'd upon the soil,
And there found comfort. " Fair, so fair is he,"
She said to them, and sigh'd ; then spoke again ;
" For he is one on whom the Morning's glow
Descended at his birth, and made his face
Bright with a golden promise. With the things
Of dream his beauty changes ; for he is
No splendid god that sits unheeding Time
Above the world in glinting solitudes,
But mortal, and the envied thing of Death.
Therefore is he the fairer ; therefore he,
With shadow'd eyes expectant of a grief,
And conscious of the hopelessness of life,
Is sad as ye, sweet flowers, that must depart
So soon, so soon, from all ye make so fair.
Often, alone, I see him stray away

PRAXIS AND NARCISSUS

Where only shadows linger, where the pine
Is still and uncomplaining; on his brow
Is Grief enthroned, and Melancholy lays
Her heavy hand upon his joyless lips.
A sister once could lead his careless steps
To where the sunbeams beckon'd; but herself
Now dwells among the shadows, and her feet
Are placed to greyer ways than we may know.
And now he shuns all sweet companionship
Of nymphs and fauns, and shepherds idle-eyed;
He wanders lonely as a homeless Wind
From glade to glade and pool to dreamy pool,
And asks of no one comfort, seeks not love."
And then bethought the nymph again of Her
To whom all lovers pray, whose rosy ears
Have heard all joy and all unhappiness
Since first she made Love's mystery her own.
And once again she raised white arms to her.
"O Venus, crown'd and radiant, look thou down
On one who is most desolate," she cried;
"All that is mine is given me by thee—
Passion and youth and passing loveliness;
Yet love's withheld, and lacking love I fain
Would give thee back thy gifts, and gladly
die.

I love Narcissus! But he looks at me
As though I were a lily, cool'd by dews,
And all unconscious of the bee's intent.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

But thou hast loved! About thee arms have
twined

And crush'd thee with a pain that seem'd most
sweet;

Above thine own have smiled a lover's lips
That droop'd with thine; thy throat has felt the
kiss

That trembled through thy being like the glow
That wakes the trees in wooing days of Spring.
Now help thou me, white Wonder of the Waves,
Venus, whom gods delight in! Hear a nymph
Who loves thee well; who dreams as thou hast
dream'd;

Who yearns for one most hopeless, one who is
Illusive as the shadow on a pool.

Oh, give to me Narcissus, whom I love!
Then, till I wander downward to the dark,
Where in the end all fairest things abide,
Whence Love is banish'd, and desire thereof,
By morn and night my praise shall rise to thee
Reminding thee of joys that were thine own."

BUT though she waited till the ringdove
coo'd

Its single note serene, thus heralding
The dusk's advance, the Goddess gave no sign
That she had heard; no music fill'd the air
With soft insistence and a hint of love,

PRAXIS AND NARCISSUS

As when low horns are tremulously blown
From hidden heights above white seas of mist.
Then Praxis knelt no longer, but arose
Like one on whom a world weighs heavily
And stumbled through the forest. On and on
She went unseeing, and unseen of aught
Except the wakeful beeches. For the nymphs
Were gather'd now where curl'd the heavy fern,
In hiding from the satyrs; and the birds
Gave little heed to things that were of earth.
From glade to glade she pass'd, from dell to dell,
Wishing the Night were come, that smiling
Sleep
Might touch her with his wand. For Sleep was
then,
As even now, benign and merciful;
Hushing the sigh upon the griever's lips
And splendoring the dark with wondrous
dreams.
Thus, unawares, she wander'd to the pool
Where linger'd yet Narcissus; and before
Her gleaming feet could haste her through the
gloom
She look'd and saw him, saw how sad he was,
And, loving him, was drawn to where he sigh'd.
And ere he knew it, she had knelt by him
Amid the whisp'ring sedges. And because
Her face was pale as Sorrow's, and as still,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Narcissus fear'd her not, but laid his hand
Most lightly on her hair and spoke to her.
“ Who, save myself, thus loves the haunted dusk,
And walks in utter loneliness? ” he ask'd.
“ A nymph thou art, and one that should be hid
Beside thy sisters ere the shadows fill
The darksome woods ; ere Night, with heavy lids,
Seeks bright Apollo's footsteps. None may see
Such mysteries, and flourish ; even now
The modest blooms have closed their pretty
eyes,
And in their nests morn's trilling choristers
Hide heads beneath the shelter of their wings.
Upon the grass Night's tears already fall,
And soon she will be with us ; who art thou
So white and fair, and yet so unafraid? ”
Then answer'd him the nymph, and look'd away
To where the waters darken'd : “ Praxis, I,
Whose love, though true, is most unfortunate ;
Therefore I wander through the woods at dusk,
Nor fear the Night, whose eyes have seen much
grief ;
Whose melancholy lips have never told
Her secret sorrow or her cherish'd dream.”
“ Thou art too young to tell of hopeless love,”
Narcissus answer'd. “ Thou art beautiful,
And who would turn from beauty save the blind?
Thy silken hair is like a golden net

PRAXIS AND NARCISSUS

To tangle hearts, and he that scorns to-day
May beg to-morrow mercy at thy hands.
And if not he, another ; for the world
Is warm with lovers as the sky with stars.”
But Praxis sigh’d. “ I love the sun,” she
said ;

“ And while the stars be many, he is one.”
“ And who is he whose eyes alone can light
Thy destined path ? ” the youth ask’d tenderly,
And press’d her pale face upward with his hand.
“ Is he a god grown weary of the heights,
And charm’d by Earth’s eterne impermanence ?
A satyr ? Or a shepherd with his pipes
And heritage of consecrated dreams ?
Or lovest thou a shadow, a desire,
A thing of heart’s own making, such as lures
Too oft the fancy of a simple maid ? ”
And while his eyes sought hers, and while his
hand

Still touch’d her throat’s warm whiteness, she
replied,

As one may speak who stands before a shrine :
“ Thou askest, who my love art. Thou art he.”

THEN look’d the nymph away, and paler
grew

Her cheeks erst red as roses ; for the hand
That almost touch’d her bosom ere she spoke

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Was now withdrawn, and chiller seem'd the
glade

Than Melancholy's sunken, shadow'd lair.

And while her gaze was fix'd upon the pool

Narcissus watch'd the glow that was her hair ;

And when he spoke his voice was like the voice

Of one long dead, most sorrowful, yet sweet

With memories of unforgotten joys.

"Nay, nay!" he said, "Oh! tell me not thou
lov'st ;

For love and I are strangers. Thou art young ;

And hid within the darkness there is one

With whom the heights of glory thou shalt tread

When Destiny so wills it, not before.

First love is often dream love ; thou shalt wake,

When steps this other from the mists of dawn

To bid thee follow where the trumpets call,

And place thy hand in his hand, unafraid.

For me the shadow, and for thee the light.

For I am one whose fate it is to be

Enroll'd among the lonely, with the cloud,

The mist and wand'ring planet. I have sought

This thing call'd love, O Praxis ; but for me

Another fate was long ago decreed.

No answ'ring flash awaits the tender glance

Of eyes that dream in mine ; upon my lips

No lips may dwell, or kiss be chastely placed.

How oft I see the shepherd striding home,

PRAXIS AND NARCISSUS

His love beside him ; in his arms he holds
The boy that seems more god-like than the best
That sits on high Olympus ; but for me
The dream is done, and evermore I hide
Where stilly pools reflect the leafy peace."

"Then life is over," wearily she said ;
"So oft I saw thee in the hush of dawn
Beside thy lovely sister. On thy breast
Her head reclined, and thus ye watch'd the glow
Suffuse the skies above ye. From afar,
Above the deeper music of the woods,
I heard thy voice when, singing in the dusk,
Ye wander'd home. Ah, thou wert happy then,
But ne'er have I known laughter or delight."

"And now," Narcissus answer'd, "thou and I
Are one in sorrow. For the maiden sleeps
In yonder grove, where never now a bird
Shall trill its song above the asphodel
And make her spirit listen ; she is one
With silent ghosts in shadow'd underlands,
Nor e'er may see the pleasant sun again."
He paused, and she beside him said no word,
But watch'd the pool with dimm'd, unseeing
eyes,

Forgetful not of hope that once was hers
And now was hers no longer. Thus at last
Are cherish'd things remember'd ; thus at last,
When all is lost, all over, and the scheme

IDYLLS OF GREECE


We dream'd of most is shatter'd, from the Past
Old hopes creep forth, old vows, and memories
Of sighs that stab like daggers to the soul.

WHEN Praxis spoke, her sorrow seem'd
forgot.

For even then, in days of wonderment,
And dream and love, and sweet desire thereof,
Life's burdens lay on women heaviest,
And women smiled despite a breaking heart.
"In yonder gardens she will wait," she said,
"For thee, O pale Narcissus. There is peace
Where now she is, in solemn lands of mist
Among grey ghosts whose lips no favors ask.
Things fair are made more beautiful by Death.
And now with gentle Proserpine she rests,
To whom, perhaps, she sings of golden dawns
And even's hush'd and unforgotten joys.
The wind's caress, the rain's insistent plea,
The tree's abandon'd dancing—these to her
Were things to find delight in; now she tells
The Queen whose eyes are greyer than her world
Her innocent and cherish'd memories.
And thou and I, Narcissus, shall behold,
Or soon or late, the loveliness again
That smiled upon earth's beauty. She shall be
Thy sister still; but I—Ah, lest I go
To that dim place where now she waits for thee

PRAXIS AND NARCISSUS

Ere thou art call'd, I beg thee kiss me once,
That there may be from thee to her a gift
To make her eyes flame welcome, even there.”
Then, bending down, he kiss'd her, as the moon
May lay its cold and passionless caress
Upon the thing that loves it; and the while
He look'd away to think what words might
soothe
The maiden's grief, and make her brave again,
The woods had won her with their lure of peace.

OW Night, for one swift second, wav'-
ring stood
Above the peaceful forest, looking down
With eyes of still compassion on the world,
Most beautiful in slumber. Fain had she
Bade Time delay her eastward hurrying
That men might dream the longer, live the while
In bliss most sweet because most innocent;
And tread the ways whereon no shadow falls
To hint the dread To-morrow. But, alas,
Time drives the Night before him; and the Day
Obeys the silent order of his eyes,
As must the frailest leaf that curls and falls,
And ever mourns a perish'd loveliness.
One second thus she linger'd, knowing well

IDYLLS OF GREECE

How idle is a sorrow unassuaged,
How very bitter, yet how very sweet.
And while the pool grew bright with many stars
Narcissus crouch'd beside it. Did he think
Of Echo, or of Praxis? On his heart
One face alone was graven, one that paled
All gather'd beauties in the underworld,
And made the sapless blossoms of the gloom
Seem sad and wither'd things. And, gazing

now

Upon the listless waters, motionless
As lies an idle mirror, and as cold,
He saw therein, beneath his own, a face
So like to hers that he all else forgot:
"O voiceless now forever!" he exclaim'd,
And yearn'd above the vision; "Thou whom
Death

Beheld amid the clover and the corn
And envied Day his fleeting right in thee!
Chill seem the woods without thee. Oh! that
thou

Couldst step with eyes of question from the
dusk,

As steps the flaming tulip from the earth
Ere Spring's warm kisses wake the sleeping
trees!

For now that thou art gather'd to the dark
I think of thee as of the hidden seed

PRAXIS AND NARCISSUS

That soon shall burst and climb to where the
air

Awaits its fragrance. But the earth's a tomb
For thee and thine, O sister; and thy face

That glimmers here would fade were mine to
turn

To where the far stars flicker. Thou art one
With all the grieving ghosts of yesterday,

And one with whispers and with memories;

And though my tears should overflow this pool,

And heaven's high vault be music'd with my
sighs,

Not one might dew thy cheek's wan loveliness,

Not one could tell thy spirit of my love.

Yet even there, where sun nor moon may shine,

And Silence stills the echoes of the stars,

I am of thee remember'd; even there

Thou standest by the uneventful sea

Dreaming of other waters, and of him

Who bade thee hear the wondrous songs of them.

How oft we saw the fingers of the Morn

Open enamor'd roses, and the Night

Lay gentle hands upon them till they closed!

How oft we two stood breathless, hand in hand,

The while above our heads, from heights of blue,

The field's impassion'd melodist, the lark,

Flung notes of melting sweetness, and was gone.

But now no song can charm thee; thou art one

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Whose day is over, and although I mourn
Thou hearest not, who art by Death beguiled."

HE ceased a while, but gazed with longing
eyes

Upon the face beneath him. Clearer now
The features gleam'd; for now the rounded
moon

Had dimm'd the stars, and fill'd with mystic
light

The void wherein the glinting earth revolved.
The soft effulgence swathed the tow'ring crests
Of solemn mountains, lit the level fields
And made distinct each giant of the woods;
The darkest glades were silver'd, and the pool,
By Zephyrs now, and insects, undisturb'd,
Was bright and polish'd like a disc of steel.
And he that lean'd beyond the water's edge
And view'd therein his sad and perfect face,
Seem'd hewn from whitest marble; motionless
As stone itself, and just as passionless.

And yet a thing to rouse the love of gods
The while his limbs in Melancholy's line
Show'd softly in the moonlight, and his head
Droop'd like a Woe above the silent flood.

But even now the three dread ministrants
Of Death's decrees, the ever-whisp'ring Fates,
Greyer than Time and far more pitiless,

PRAXIS AND NARCISSUS

Were watching him, for whom the pallid moon
And all the tinted glories of the day
Would soon be fainter than a cherish'd dream.
He knew it not. But soon there reach'd his ear
A bird's shy voice, as though while half awake
It chirp'd its dream; then loud and louder still
The notes became, until the shimm'ring air
Throbb'd with the song of passion, and the
Night,

Despite its poignant sorrow, seem'd to smile!
Then from the pool Narcissus turn'd his face
And saw the moon above. "O thou," he cried,
"Who art the wan, white blossom of the skies,
Who watchest ever in the odor'd fields
Where only gods may linger, and the stars!
Pursuer thou of an illusive dream,
Whose doom it is to seek, but never find,
The one thou lovest ever. Hear, O hear,
The plaint of him whose love is like thine own—
As hopeless as the foam of driven seas!
She whom I mourn is hidden from the day;
Upon her breast the world lies heavily,
And far from me, and far from loveliness,
And song and sunshine and the things of light
Her spirit wanders, comfortless and cold.
Why went she hence? The daffodils remain;
Yon bird whose voice reminds me of her own
Is happy still; but she is with the ghosts,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

With all the hopeless and unyearning things
That crowd the bleak, black realms of bitter
Death.

A little while she might have stay'd with me,
Who loved her well. But me she left alone;
Left the bright dawn, the sunset, and the peace
That follows Twilight's footsteps. She and I
Have watch'd thy face together, hopeless Moon;
Thy beams have lit our wand'rings in the past,
And thou hast heard us whisper of our dreams.
Ah! would that she might come to us again,
To pity thee, and, with the olden love,
Ward from my heart the fell approach of
gloom."

Then ceased he speaking for a little space
And eyed again his beauty in the pool,
And sigh'd the more. But all unconsciously
The bird sang on; and sang, and sang, and sang
Until it seem'd the air could hold no more
Of such delicious music. Then the gods,
From where they dream'd amid the firmament
And knew not yet what clamor'd in the dark,
Bent down to note the singer and the song,
And saw—Narcissus! And a Wind arose
From where it lay beyond the olived hills,
And sped to where he languish'd; then it touch'd
His heavy locks and made him lift anew
His lovely head in question. And the gods

PRAXIS AND NARCISSUS

Had need of him, and drew the moon away
And hush'd the bird and left him all alone.
And when again his eyes beheld the pool
The face he sought had vanish'd, and his voice
Above the empty waters was the voice
Of leaves that know their doom is very near.
“O thou,” he sigh'd, “fond sister and fond
love,

Where thou art gone I soon shall, haply, come;
Our dreams and our desires the heralds are
To where our spirits hasten; and our feet
Ascend a little moment, then decline
To paths of mist and silence. Nevermore
The dawn shall lure me to the quest of gold
No hand may sully; and the Dusk shall lay
Its kiss upon the forest, but no more
Shall I behold the wonderment thereof.
A little while and I shall be with thee,
Beyond the constant sorrow of the world
And melancholy night. Upon the shores
Of yon dim land be thou to beacon me
Across the awful river, that thy face
May cheer my fearful ghost which Death shall
shear

Of all its body's beauty, and its hope.”
And then he sought the ever-whisp'ring reeds
And fell asleep. But oh! no dreams illumed
His fringed eyes, no fancies fretted him

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Or made him sigh in slumber. Well he sleeps
Who dreams no more, who nevermore may yearn
For that which gods found vain long, long ago.

AND thus the Dawn beheld him, as she sped
In robes of rose and silver o'er the world,
Yet fain had linger'd where Narcissus lay
So very silent. For the youth was fair
As is a shelter'd rosebud, and the wings
Of Death had touch'd him very lovingly.
To see him now, one had not thought him dead,
But sleeping only. On the grass he lay;
His head supported by a marbled arm,
His rounded cheek, so waxen, lightly press'd
Against a reed imprison'd in his hand.
And all around strange blossoms, newly born,
Uprear'd their frail and ghostly loveliness
And look'd with shy delight upon the world.
For these the gifts were of the gracious gods;
Who take our things of beauty, yet bestow,
If we but knew, great blessings in their place—
Age with its peace for Youth and its desire,
Flowers from the dust that seem'd to us so dear.
And there, amid the nodding loveliness,
These starry blooms that ever hint of rest,
Narcissus lay the while the Zephyrs touch'd
His tinted lids in pity, ere they fled
To sights less sad, although less beautiful,

PRAXIS AND NARCISSUS

Beyond the distant mountains. Morning came
And linger'd, too ; then yielded place to Day,
Who stood enwrapt above the wondrous youth,
And dried his limbs of Night's uncounted tears
And bade the birds lament him. One by one
They came and wonder'd, mutely questioning
With heads a-slant why he so silent lay ;
Then all at once they knew, and soon the woods
Were told the secret in divinest song.
But naught could break his slumber. Still he
lay

Upon his fragrant pillow, heeding not
The Wind, the heaven's mourner, or the kiss
Of splendid Phœbus as he bent from out
The azure skies, unhalting ; hearing not
The sedges' sighing or the cry of stars.
All now for him was over ; over now
The mad pursuit of things that are of dream,
The idle chase of phantoms in the flash
'Twixt dark and dark ; the impotent desire
For all that proves illusive, being won.
Amid the ghostly blossoms he reposed,
Amid the pale narcissi ; that might see
The earth's unconscious beauty, and the hills,
The stars that flamed at even ; that could hear,
And welcome while they listen'd, while they
heard,
The song of Thya as she near'd the pool.

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

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ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

ONCE on a time, ah! long ago it was,
And faint the wind's voice when it sings
thereof,

There roam'd amid the forest's leafy peace
One loved of gods and women. For his hand
Could tease such airy music from a lute
That Zeus himself had noticed; and his eyes,
Whose fringing lids cast shadows on his cheeks,
Allured persuasion and were ever kind,
From early youth the lad had stray'd alone,
Of solitude enamor'd; and although
The while he smote his uncouth instrument
The nymphs would peep at him through bush
and fern,

And wild-eyed Mænads long'd to lay their lips
Upon his glinting curls, or touch his brow,
He scorn'd them all and ever went his way

IDYLLS OF GREECE

No slave but gentle Music's, and her king.
With lute in hand he climb'd the tawny hills
Or linger'd in the meadows ; and his notes
Fill'd the sweet air about him, as the stars
Fill the deep sky with throbbing harmonies,
And maidens' hearts with strange unquietude.
And when he sang, pale Splendor sat by him ;
And Glory made more wonderful the eyes
That ever look'd with pitiless disdain
On fond, dishevell'd loveliness—on nymphs
That near'd him when he rested or would dream.
But woe to him, however high he stares,
Who heeds not Love's advances. Beauty
scorn'd
Joins hands with Hate ; and these same minis-
trants
Of slim Diana's orders, these same maids
And these same Mænads on a later day
Forgot his wondrous singing and his lute—
Remember'd he was Orpheus, wed to dreams,
Who scorn'd their proffer'd pity, scorn'd their
love.
Then hated they and slew him ; as the world
Still hates the thing above the common plane,
And slays the singer for his deathless song.

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

AMID the crowding stars the joyless moon
Pick'd her slow way on such a breathless
night

As soothes the world in summer. On the hills
The yellow corn was silent, for the wind
With viewless, teasing fingers touch'd it not,
Nor stirr'd the crimson poppies in their sleep.
Between the fields an argent river wound
Its lazy course and murmur'd peacefully ;
The constant willows mourn'd along its edge
With slanting firs and alders ; on its breast
Among the waxen lilies, dusky birds
Hid their bright bills and waited for the morn.
But stiller was the forest than the field,
And stiller than the meadow ; for the trees
Are solemn warders of the things that sleep
Within the womb of earth. All day they wave
Their lissome arms above the thing they guard,
And bid the sunshine bless it ; but when comes
Illusion-loving Night and all her train
Of slinking shadows, then the trees are still,
And still the world they have the keeping of.
But one amid this fragrant stilliness,
This holy hush of a maternity
Mysterious and eternal, slumber'd not,
But, phantom-like, sped lightly through the
woods,

Disconsolate and restless. It was he

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Who scorn'd all maidens, Orpheus, weary-eyed,
One doom'd to sing and suffer for his song.
But now his lute was voiceless ; and the moon,
The while it peep'd through leafy lattices
And made his pale limbs paler, saw no wreath
Of ivy leaves upon his shadow'd brow,
Upon his lips no hint of coming song.
And while he wander'd on he thus complain'd
In tones so gentle that the list'ning trees
But faintly heard. "Apollo, music's lord,
Bright god of morning, hear, O hear!" he cried.
"There came to me a dream upon a time
When I was but a child, and through the years
That dream is my desire. For then it seem'd
That thou, who in the pensive twilight sing'st
In wingèd words the requiem of Day,
My playing heard'st from where thou wanderest
Among the constellations. Thou didst hear
The songs I sing thee while I face the dawn,
And greet thee with such music as my hand
May draw from my imperfect instrument.
Thine eyes grew soft, O flame-apparel'd god,
And far Olympus warm'd beneath thy smile.
And then from out the bosom of the sky
An eagle downward circled, ring'd me round
In balanced flights and ever nearer drew
Until it poised and settled at my feet.
And lo! It was from thee a messenger,

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

And bore upon its wings so rare a lute
That when my fingers smote it I seem'd mad.
The while I play'd, the trees, like happy girls
Sway'd to and fro, and touch'd me lovingly;
The skies seem'd ever softer; and from out
The sacred earth sweet flowers, before their
time,

Stepp'd to the dusk with question in their eyes.
The very stars were mute; and oftentimes
The winds along the winding lanes of space
Lay hush'd and breathless. When afar I
stray'd

To hopeless wastes of ever shifting sand,
The beasts crept forth from caverns of despair
And lick'd my scented sandals; and, anon,
The rivers roll'd no longer to the sea,
But lay like polish'd silver 'neath the moon.
But most I joy'd, O Splendor, when at eve
The lovers heard my playing; and with eyes
That ever gazed on things unseen of me
Sat hand in hand, and whisper'd or were still.
And when at last the pale moon caution'd them
Against the night's advance, they slowly rose
And, looking ever backward, pass'd away
To dawn and hope, yet not forgetting me.
A dream it was; but since that golden night
Whene'er I see the shy nymphs following
My music's spell, I think how I might play

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Hadst thou been kind and made my wild dream
true."

Complaining thus, he wander'd ever on,
Light-footed, heavy-hearted, like a ghost,
From moon-lit glades to dells of evergreen
Where gloom and shadows linger'd. But the
god,
The flame-faced, bright Apollo, answer'd not,
Nor made a sign that he had even heard.

AND now the stars were slowly vanishing
Amid the grey of morning. One by one
Along the winding, wind-swept terraces
Their lights went out, and then the sky was like
A sombre field whence flowers have disappeared.
But soon, where seem'd the earth and sky to
merge,

Where grey kiss'd grey in steely solitude,
There show'd a blush that slowly crimson turn'd,
And then all golden; and, as with a shout
A happy boy may burst upon a glade
Where Revery has linger'd, from the East
The Day glow'd forth and fill'd all azured space
With song and laughter and suggested joy.
And while he still bethought him of his dream,
And onward strode in silence, Orpheus saw
Beside the winding path ahead of him
An ancient oak, a tow'ring veteran

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

Amid the forest's warders. And beneath
This hoary tree, this oak whose memories
Were countless as the multiplying stars,
Stood one, a god, who there awaited him
As white and stilly as a thing of stone.
But now the golden lances of the sun
Had pierced the darkest thicket, and from where
The youth stood startled, he became aware
Of who this was that waited. "Thou," he
cried,

With eager hand outstretch'd in front of him,
"That Hermes art that bearest for the gods
Their awful messages, and bringest men
Their dread commands. Thy wingèd shoes I
see,

Still smoking from thy perilous descent.
Upon thy brow the majesty abides
That proves thee friend of Zeus; serenity
Enswathes thy presence, and thy level gaze
Compels my soul's attention. Therefore speak!"
And then from out the shelter of the oak
Stepp'd shining Hermes. In his hand he held
A lute of carven ivory and gold
That glitter'd in the sunshine; and while yet
The startled youth beheld him in amaze,
And fain had spoken, he whose face was bright
From gazing on the countenance of Zeus
Commanded silence, and address'd him thus:

IDYLLS OF GREECE

“ Apollo greets thee, Orpheus, envied one ;
Thou younger brother of the singing winds,
And wildly joyous waters ! Thee he greets,
And bids thee hymn the praises of the gods
On this sweet lute, which he, who loves thee well,
Has waken'd with his fingers. On thy head,
All golden still with sun-delighting curls,
His glory has descended ; in thine eyes
Abides the peace of yonder sapphire heights
When he, the flaming-featured, sits at eve
And hymns the downward hasting of the Day.
Take, then, his lute, O favor'd melodist,
O youth whom men shall envy ages hence.
Thou still art young, art happy. Wisdom
waits

To line thy brow ; thy rosy cheeks must pale
And sink as Age approaches, and thy heart
Must open soon to Sorrow and Regret.
But now thou art the favor'd thing of gods,
And they would give, to prove to thee their love,
The gifts that are to older men denied.
The thrush is still thy brother ; in the heights
The lark's song sounds no clearer than thine
own ;

Thy laughter is more beautiful than prayer.
Thy simple joy is holy as the love
Within a mother's bosom, and thy smile
More wondrous is than sunshine. Take thy lute

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

And sing with face uplifted to the stars
The song Love whispers in the ear of Death
Who stares with chilling eyes across the Styx.
Thus men shall learn the beauty of thy dreams
And bless thee as the night descends on them."
Then still was he. And when, with downcast
eyes

And hands upraised, the happy-hearted youth
Had sunk to earth, his stammer'd gratitude
Reach'd Hermes' ears. But he, the Messenger,
His task completed, laid Apollo's gift
Beside the oak, and suddenly was gone.
So pass the gods, and thus they ever come.
An instant's flash we see them if we gaze
With willing eyes where glints the wand'ring
beam,

Where sighs the wind in caverns by the sea,
Or ghostly moonbeams linger in the dell.
An instant we behold them, then again
The air contains them and we know them not.
And when at last the youth upraised his eyes,
Half doubting, yet most hopeful, he beheld
The precious thing all ready to his hand
And ran to seize it. Hermes was forgot!

SOFTLY above the world's fresh loveliness
The blessed sunshine trembled; woods and
hills

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And ever-dreaming valleys felt the kiss
That quickens life within them, in the womb
Where unborn beauty bides till blossom-time.
From dawn till dusk this wondrous blessing falls,
This soft annunciation; and the Night—
Majestic, mild, unfathomable Night,
Enswathed in peace, and diadem'd with stars—
When ended is the wooing of the Day
And all the world lies mute with weariness,
Strange secrets whispers and sweet promises.
But now, as when a golden-visaged god,
Peering alone from glinting heights at dawn
Beholds with joy a newly-fashion'd sphere,
Careless of all around him, Orpheus found
Contentment in his wonder-waking lute.
For even while he breathed upon the strings,
Bending the while above their mystery
As bends a mother o'er her first, fair child,
They answer'd him with music, sigh'd their love,
And thrill'd to tell their passion to the world.
'Tis thus the Zephyrs with eternal breath
Lure strange harmonics from the silv'ry stars
And hidden orbs of heaven, thus they fill
The thirsty void with melodies unheard
Of all except the dreamer, and the one
Who watches from the hill-tops for the dawn.
But soon the youth stood solemnly erect,
With face upraised and fingers on the lute

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

Close-press'd against his shoulder; and his
mouth

Was like a crimson blossom that awaits
A secret message from a wand'ring Wind.
And while he smiled, and while within his eyes
A softness linger'd as in darken'd pools
An utter peace is oft made manifest,
The Song descended on him, and at last
He pluck'd the strings and lured the music
thence.

Above his head, the moon, despite the hour
Peep'd through the blue (as e'en to-day she
peeps

But sees no leaf-crown'd, later melodist
With glowing face uplifted to her own).
For now the air was thrilling; chord on chord
By magic fingers drawn from vibrant strings
Ascended slowly to the list'ning gods,
And bade them bend in breathless tenderness
Above their last creation. Once again
They dream'd the beauty that was yet unborn—
Of constant hills and plains of emerald
And joyous forests swaying in the breeze;
Again they knew the olden wonderment,
Again the olden rapture. For the strains
That reach'd their ears awaken'd memories,
As even now sweet music wakes in us
Forgotten dreams, and frets us with a sense

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Of faint, far voices, hush'd long years ago.
And soon the stately trees began to wave
Their graceful arms, gnarl'd oaks and
 cypresses,
And mournful cedars whose complaint had been
The scorn of winds when Time itself was young.
But when the flowers, forgetful of their dreams,
Upturn'd their pretty faces, beautiful
As gay-apparel'd maids in revery,
The winds grew still like children when they
 stand
Within the presence of a mystery.
But still the heedless player smote his lute ;
And when at last he gazed on common things,
Grown weary of the splendors of the skies,
The forest's beasts were mingled with the kine,
While birds had flock'd about him ; then he knew
The god, indeed, had granted him his dream,
And deem'd himself a rival of the stars.



FOR many days he wander'd joyously
From dawn till dusk along the wind-
 blown slopes
Of yellow'd hills, or where the cooler peace
Of silent woods invited. Ever now
His lute was his companion, for its voice

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

Was sweeter than the voices of the maids
That tempted him from fragrant coppices
Or hidden pools where only midges stirr'd.
And while he play'd another life seem'd his,
In other worlds he walk'd, with other men ;
And heard them tell of silv'ry happenings
Where gods alone assembled. Of the nymphs,
Who spied his beauty through enamor'd eyes,
He had no thought, nor even glanced at them.
He heeded not their callings or their sighs,
And scorn'd their lures and playful wantonness ;
For dreams are Music's silent acolytes,
And he who dreams is well accompanied.
And yet he was not happy. For it seem'd
The very voices heard above the peace
Suggested things to Orpheus still unknown—
Suggested love, although he knew it not.
For ye that wait beside the tideless sea,
No more aspiring and desiring naught
Save shadow and the silence, know too well
How thoughtless youth goes singing to the dark
Despite the calling voices and the sighs.
Only when all is over, and the sky
No more is bright with flaming presences,
And air itself is emptied of its song,
Comes useless wisdom, follow'd by regret
And longing for the thing that once was scorn'd.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

BUT one there was in those untroubled woods
Whose eyes were grey and restful, while her
mouth,

Whose crimson lips were strangers to delight,
Was sad as with a sorrow pre-conceived.
A slim, sweet maid, on whom pale Loveliness
Had laid her hand, and with caressive touch
Had fashion'd her to be a thing as fair
As the white rose that only dreams of death.
And yet the maid was fearless, for the swains
That follow'd hotly when the nymphs allured
Were silent in her presence, deeming her
To Beauty consecrate, a child of dreams,
Beyond desire, beyond the lips of men.
And while she pass'd from sunlight to the shade,
From glen to grove where dream'd the cypresses,
The gods themselves had eyed her, with her hair
Of ruddy brown, a-gleam about her limbs;
And loving well the thing most beautiful
Had wish'd that she were gather'd to themselves.
But still she linger'd on the earth she loved,
Not sad, nor wholly joyous; but a maid
Who dreamt, perhaps, of others' happiness,
And wonder'd when her loneliness might end.
This, then, was she, the nymph Eurydice,
Whose fate it was to blossom for a day
Amid the sunshine and the song of birds,
And learn of love; and while unsatisfied,

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

With sadder eyes, and oh ! far sadder mouth,
To leave it all ere finish'd was the dream
And ere the grey subdued her tresses' sheen.

ABOVE a fragrant hyacinth she knelt
When Orpheus first beheld her. He had
come

Unconsciously upon her, fing'ring thus
His wondrous lute until there thrill'd from it
A very glow of music ; and his eyes
Were fix'd upon the sunset till it seem'd
He saw the gods there, and communed with
them.

While yet afar the magic strains she heard
And could not move, but still upon her knees
Awaited him, the lovely hyacinth
Between her fingers, longing to be pluck'd,
And sweet, shy wonder mirror'd on her face.
And as he near'd, her heart the faster beat,
And fain had she arisen. But the spell
That binds us yet whene'er the Master plays
Now bound her fast ; and shelt'ring modestly
Her maiden charms beneath her wondrous hair,
She watch'd his slow and harmonied approach.
And thought at first it was a god that play'd.
For Glory seem'd his presence to enswathe,
And glinting locks caress'd a nobler brow
Than that of sun-tann'd shepherd, or the king

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Whom constant care keeps questioningly pale.
But more than all she wonder'd at his eyes.
For his were eyes that calculated not ;
Unfearing eyes ; such eyes as love the world ;
The eyes one sees in visions, luminous,
Yet strangely peaceful. But they saw her not
Until he stood above her, then at once
He seem'd to start and waken from his dream.
Then ceased his wondrous playing. Naught
was said,

But each beheld the other ; and at last
With such a movement as a child may make
That fears correction from the one belov'd,
She raised the hand that held the hyacinth,
And slowly he received it. To his lips
He press'd the fragrant petals ; then he spoke,
And softer was his voice than is the wind
That wakes the jasmine blossoms in the dawn :
“ Art thou not that Eurydice,” he ask'd,
“ Of whom the shepherds speak in wonderment ?
For I have heard them tell of one like thee
With grey and wistful eyes, such eyes as hint
Devotion and demure solicitude.
This maid, said they, all unattended is
By satyr or by shepherd, and alone
Discovers each secluded hiding-place
Of gentle faun amid the curling fern.
This say they not unkindly, but as youths

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

That know thy spirit's beauty, deeming thee
As much beyond the shelter of their arms
As the pale beam that shines from Even's star."
And she, with gaze still fix'd upon his face
As though it soon might vanish, answer'd: "Yes.
That maid am I, that frail Eurydice,
Whose heart is Night's, because the Night alone
Is kind and gentle and the thing I love.
Yet sometimes, as the morning call'd thee forth
To where the hills lay gleaming, I have peer'd
Through leafy coverts at thy golden face
And wish'd that I were with thee, with thy lute
And eyes of hope and promise. I have heard
Thy strange, wild hymns, and follow'd from
afar

Thy wayward feet until the heights forbade
My closer coming. I have heard thee play
The songs of dusk, the flower's sweet requiem,
And thrilling welcome to the envious stars
That hasten'd out with Day's departing glare.
And oft at night, when silent were the woods
Save for the call of list'ning bird to bird,
It seem'd I heard thy music; but, alas!
The sound was but the echo in my heart
Remember'd with the glory of thy face."
Then look'd the maid away. The sun had set
While yet she spoke, and made the sky ablaze
As though a thousand torches had been lit

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Below the far horizon. Golden clouds
Lay pinn'd on fields of crimson and of blue,
Suggesting deep infinitudes of peace
And argent orbs; and all so restful was
One knew the low-brow'd Night was very near.

THEN he that stood above the silent maid
Bent low his head until his gleaming curls
Were mingled with the dusk that was her hair.
“Then tell me, fair Eurydice,” he said,
And held against his lips her hyacinth,
“Then tell me if thou knowest me by name
Or only by my music? Night and day
Pale nymphs have sigh'd behind me, but thy
face

Was not with theirs, else often had I dream'd
And smiled in sleep to think thee close to me.”
And looking still beyond him she replied:
“Thou art the dreamer, Orpheus, whom, 'tis
said,

A maid delights not. She that loveth thee
Loves hopelessly forever; she shall be
Sad as the joyless willow, and her tears
Shall be her only solace, save her sighs.”
But now he knelt beside her. “Nay,” said he,
“Who telleth this of me hath slander'd me.
Why turnest thou thy face away from me?
If this were true, then shouldst thou pity me,

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

Even as maids have wept to hear the tale
Of Echo, or the lorn Endymion.
If I am cold when maids advances make,
And turn deaf ears to whispers, blame thou
them,

Whose voices sound less wooing than the Song
That draws my spirit upward to the gods
By its transcendent passion. She whose eyes
Would light in me the constant fires of love
Must love it, too; love dawn and its delights,
Love day with all its promise. And at last
When tasks are done, and drowsy-lidded Night
Lays soothing hands upon our guiltless brows,
This maid must be my temple, that in her
My happy soul may find its promised peace.”
But naught she said, and still she look’d away
To where the sky grew darker. In her ears
His voice still linger’d, but her heart was
sad

As the sad star that pales before the moon,
As the sad shell with its one memory.
Then reach’d the lad for his belovèd lute
And, kneeling still, essay’d so sweet a strain
That ere he knew it she had turn’d to him
Her tell-tale eyes, and he was clasping her
As lovers clasp when passion masters them.
“That one art thou!” he cried. “Thou art
the pearl

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The gods have dropp'd from heaven, I take
thee now

For ever and for ever. In thy hair
The dusk is hiding, but thine eyes betray
Their precious secret, O Eurydice!
Now seems it that white filaments of dream
Descend about us softly, hiding us
In utter pity from the eyes that peer
In moody contemplation on the world;
And all my vanish'd music, strain by strain
Of long-forgotten sweetness, comes again
From airy heights, where melody is stored,
To bid my heart beat tunefully with thine.
Thou knowest that I love thee; for the soul
Can hear the thought unutter'd, as the rose
Can see thy beauty when thou touchest it.
Answer me not! Thy silence sacred is,
And in those eyes the blessèd words I see
Thy lips shall tell me later. Only I
Must wake this dark with holy promises
That Night shall witness, Night, the pitiful,
The hopeless and the constant, Night benign."
But now she laid her fingers on his lips;
And though she wept, yet smiled she, and her
cheek

Lay warm against his own. And then she spoke.
"O first, fond love, O Orpheus, my Belov'd,
Thy vows are on thy forehead, in thine eyes,

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

Whose light I see the while mine own are closed.”
And fain had he then spoken, but again
She laid her scented fingers on his lips
And smiled at him. “Nay, Orpheus, answer
not,”

She said, and sigh’d. “Thy silence is more
dear

Than vows to me, who know thou lovest me.
Thou knowest now how I have dream’d of thee,
And still shall dream, for in her inmost heart
A woman dreams forever of her love.
Too well I know that thou art Music’s slave,
And she thy spirit’s mistress. When she calls
Thou shalt forget the fond Eurydice
Who loves thee to adoring. To the gods
Thy gaze must be directed, for a god
Has chosen thee to fill with melody
The crystal sphere that rolls beneath his feet.
And even though thou lovest me the while,
And though thy kisses sometimes warm my lips,
Thou art not mine, my lover! Night and day
Thou still shalt sing, shalt follow when the Song
Compels thy spirit’s service. On thy lips
Love trembles, and thy passion; in my heart
My love is mute, for I a woman am,
And woman’s love is silent. And although
I know thou art beyond me, I shall dream
And love thy shadow, thankful that the gods,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Who envy men their little happiness,
Have let me love and minister to thee.
Above our heads they sit and stare at us
With bright, cold eyes, for they are merciless
And love me little who have loved so well.
But though they slay me ere the Night be gone,
And I become to thee a memory
As pale as this ill-fated hyacinth,
Throughout the æons I shall yearn for thee
And call to thee, dear Orpheus, whom I love.”
But now he kiss’d her lips. “Fear not,” he
said;
“The gods will grant us years of happiness
Because they love my playing. Thou and I
Shall yet grow old together, thinking back
To this sweet night in silence. From thine eyes
I kiss their tears. Thy face is white and wan,
But dawn shall find it rosy! From the skies
Stars smile on thee their blessing, and the woods
Exhale for thee their fragrant incenses
Because, like me, they love thee.” Then, the
while
The perfect peace enshrined them, to the Night
They told their dreams. Ah! that was long
ago.

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

THE morning saw their nuptials. Nymphs
and swains

Were brought together by a Triton's horn
Blown by a shaggy satyr. From the hills,
The dells and solemn forests, they obey'd
The festive summons, and their laughter woke
The stilly pools before the breezes stirr'd.
There came old Pan, his haunches wet with dew,
And wishing he were younger; and the maids
Whose hearts had throbb'd when Orpheus gazed
at them,


Now stood on tiptoe by the hoary oaks
To watch his nearing with Eurydice.
For loved was he by many; and although
His heart was now another's, and that one
Had mingled seldom with them, they forgave
Because her beauty still'd their enmity.
And while the first, faint sunbeams fill'd the
woods,

And little birds uplifted to the sky
Their sweet and silv'ry challenge, through the
trees

The golden pair came slowly; and their eyes
Were like the eyes of dreamers, for they saw
Such things as ye may see when Love dispels
The shadow and the sorrow with its wings.
And, hand in hand, before these witnesses
Each swore by Zeus and the immortal gods

IDYLLS OF GREECE

To love the other, to be pure and true
Until the mists beyond the noiseless Styx
Envelop'd them forever. Then with song
The happy morn was ended; and at last,
When nymphs and swains had vanish'd in the
green,
And only faintly was their laughter heard,
They kiss'd, and by the river broke their fast.

OW fair the earth to them that are in
love;
How rare its simplest pleasure! On the
hills

White splendors ever wander, and the sea
Is joyous with a wild, impassion'd song.
The humblest blossom, seen through lover's
eyes,

Becomes a wonder, and the glow-worm's lamp
A star that flares in rivalry with suns.
Who has not seen on iris-dotted heights
Young lovers gazing seaward? Hand in hand,
The gently waving sedges at their feet,
They watch the growing glory, hear the hymns
Of strong, unfetter'd breezes, and behold
The ships go down to distant lands of dream
Or rise from isles of fragrance. As they roam

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

In Spring's green lanes or Autumn's listless
woods,

Who has not seen them, and beheld the while
A glimpse of something holy, something kin
To that diviner beauty yet to be?

And years ago, in that untroubled Greece
Whereof I sing, two lovers hand in hand,
Thus trod the heights that smiled above a sea
Of sapphire peace and promise; day by day
They heard its song, and, hearing it, forgot
Those other voices that are sometimes heard
Above the silence—voices passionless,
That hint the vain illusion of delight.

And one was ever playing on a lute
Such music as no later melodist
May weave from dreams, but airs as fanciful
As breezy whispers in the purpling gums
Or rhythmic cadences of heaving seas.
And she that listen'd? Ah! the stars can tell
Of few that loved as she loved; for the face
That flamed beside her was the face of one
Who hears strange singing, and abides beyond
The hollow voices and the touch of hands.
And while he play'd, she sorrow'd, saying
naught,

Because she loved so truly; and because
The gods decree that she who truly loves
Must pay in silence for the dream thereof.

IDYLLS OF GREECE

BUT one hot noon, while Orpheus lay asleep
And dreaming where the heavy fern was
cool,

There slipp'd away the sad Eurydice
To wander in the sunshine. Bending down
She kiss'd his brow and heard him faintly call
Her own dear name, and fain had kiss'd again
Had he not turn'd in sleep away from her.
Then sigh'd she once and left him, looking back,
Ah! many times, ere he by trees was hid
And seen of her no longer. Then again
She faced the fields where call'd a happy lark
The while it quiver'd upward through the blue.
And wand'ring on she told of her distress
To crown'd Apollo, lord of light and song;
Yet spake most gently, as if loth to break
The heavy silence with so sad a tale:
"Far-darting god!" she sigh'd; "thy gift it is
That shares with me the heart of him I love;
To thee he prays the while his fingers draw
Impassion'd melody from golden strings—
To me he turns when he no more may play,
Of me he thinks but when his song is done.
Apollo! bright Apollo! Unto thee
All eyes are turn'd in heaven; for love of thee
Unearthly splendors languish, even she
Whose beauty is the marvel of the world.
Thou weariest of homage, for thy feet

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

Fly ever on, until, all-luminous,
Thy backward-blowing tresses pale the stars;
Thy girdle is all ruddy like a flame;
Thy days are mark'd with countless victories,
And thou shalt conquer till the end of time.
The constant Hours adore thee; thee adore
Bright youths and rosy maidens; and the sea,
The while it sings its everlasting hymn,
Yearns for thy smile, and lifts its hands to thee.
Wilt thou not, then, this worshiper renounce
That I may have him wholly, I, who have
No gift except the blessing of his love,
No joy except in his companionship? ”
Above her head the lark had disappear'd
In faintly echo'd music; in the fields
Stray bees were humming, and a solemn peace
Lay softly on the pale anemones
That touch'd her feet in pity; and the while
She dried her tears, a little path she spied
That led away through yellow, breast-high corn,
And there she wander'd. Oh, the woe of it!,
Had she but linger'd where the fields were green;
Had she but heard her husband's bitter cry,
Who e'en in sleep was troubled; had she turn'd
And sought the solace of the woods again!
For hardly was she hid among the grain
Than one uprose before her, one whose face
Was red with passion, and his eyes, a-blaze,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Glared in their shadow'd caverns, dry with lust.
"Speak not!" he cried. "That Aristæus I
Whose father is Apollo. Thee I loved
Ere Cadmus' daughter came to me as spouse,
And thee I dream of while, with perish'd charms,
She holds me in her prisoning embrace.
Thee sought I on the hillside, in the dell
Where ferny couches waited; I have roam'd
All Greece to hear thee whisper; and at last
I saw thee with thy lute-enamor'd love
Asleep within the forest. Even then
I might have slain thy lover; even then
I might have borne thee sorrowing away
To where my heights await thee. But my blade
Was never rusted by a coward's blood,
And still he plays, unheedful of thy charm.
This very morn my bees went wand'ring forth
From hives of pearl and silver, and the Wind
Cried, 'Seek, and find!'; to thee, Eurydice,
My steps were led. Now swear I by the Wind
To take what gods have given. Fair art thou,
And mine this fated hour thou shalt be.
Thou knowest all, and my desire of thee.
That I may go, submit, and share with me
The heavy kisses on thy lord bestow'd."
Thus speaking, he approach'd her. But the
girl,
Who all this while had listen'd, loathing him,

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

Was girl no longer, but a woman grown,
And hated and despised him. "Thou!" she
cried,

And stood her ground with arms upon her
breast,

"Thou art not man, but reptile! In my dreams
Fierce things I see, rough bears and hungry
wolves,

And evil birds of haggard solitudes,
But never face so loathsome as thine own,
Nor eyes so awful. Leave me, or I call
To him who loves me as the shepherd loves
The fleecy lamb that hides beside the ewe."

Now Aristæus soften'd. "Nay," he said,
And smiled as though his purpose were forgot;
"Too fierce am I for such a maid as thee.

My days are spent in hunting; dogs and men
My comrades are, and I was made for storm
Rather than summer weather, like thy lord.

And seeing thee, my passion master'd me
Because thou art so perfect. Through thy hair
Thy body's whiteness glistens, tempting me
Beyond endurance, who am merely man
And no far-vision'd singer. But, behold!

Myself I curb, I draw from thee away,
As from the altar of the Matchless One
Soil'd men withdraw the while they pray to her.
Eurydice, I love thee! By thy hair,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Thy heavy, clinging tresses ; by thine eyes,
Thy greyer eyes than wings of Paphian doves,
I love thee and adore thee ! Come with me !”
But she shrank back. Ah ! would that she had
call'd,

Or that a god had help'd her. But alone
A woman fights while Destiny conspires
To tear her down ; small wonder that she falls !
And he, the foul pursuer, smiled again,
With arms outstretch'd. “ Thou waverest,” he
cried,

“ Because my passion warms thee. Come with
me,

And leave thy beardless Orpheus to his dreams.
I know strange things to teach thee, mysteries
Unknown to one who plays upon a lute
While sighs his love beside him. Thou shalt be
The envied maid in breezy Attica,
And weary of me never. At thy feet
Strange skins I'll fling ; thy perfect hands shall
gleam

As gleams the firmament on splendid nights
When nightingales are singing. Thou shalt be
The mistress of my fabled palaces,
And queen of all my gardens. Thou shalt see
My golden bees, and they shall follow thee
As though thou wert of honey ; night and day
My golden bees shall bring strange tales to thee

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

Of red, enamor'd blossoms, till thy wrists
Grow hot above thy pulses, and thy lips
Turn greedily to mine for kiss on kiss.
Eurydice! I love thee! Come with me
And sit beside me while the rosy boys
Serve wine from hammer'd goblets, and the
slaves

Drop scented petals on a polish'd floor
That else might shame us with our mirror'd love.
I love thee. Come!" But she, who, while he
spoke,

Had stood with heaving bosom and fix'd eye,
And heard with growing horror his appeal,
Now answer'd bravely: "Beast! thou worse than
beast!

The slinking wolf abhors thee, and the air
Must be polluted when thou breathest it.
By such as thee, the spawn of idle lust,
The gods are brought to judgment, and no
more

Men praise them as when first they ruled the
world.

Now smilest thou no more! But better thus
To face me than with honey'd insolence,
With talk of love, and bees, and rosy boys,
And all the horrors of thy wantonness.
O would I were a man! For, long ere this,
Had I borne arms and seen those eyes of thine,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Grey death had been thy portion, and our
Greece

Had been the cleaner for thy taking off.

No need to say I loathe thee. Get thee gone!"

And then he sprang upon her. "Fool," he
cried,

"Thy husband slumbers and the corn is high!

Call once and thee I strangle. By the gods,

I swear to spoil thee as my golden bees

Have spoil'd full many a flower; thy crimson
dreams

Shall make each night a torment unto thee!"

And then he strove to fling her in the corn,

Yet ever kept one hand upon her mouth

Because he fear'd her outcry. To and fro

They sway'd in awful silence, and the fight

Was very even, for the maid was strong

And knew his hand was useless. And at last

He tripp'd, and she was fleeing. But alas!

While yet her laughter rippled on the air

And all the world look'd beautiful again,

A serpent hiss'd and struck her; and before

Her lips could frame the name she loved so well

She stagger'd and had fallen. And the Day,

When once the storm is over, and the fields

Are strewn with broken beauties, sees no face

So white as that the ravisher beheld

The while he bent above her ere he fled.

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

THE sun had set. Sad Winds were waning
d'ring now

Upon the distant hillsides, and anon,
When the mild azure turn'd to violet
They laid soft hands upon the yellow corn
And bent it softly earthward. From the fields
The poppies gazed no longer at the sky
But shut their eyes before the stars came forth,
And dream'd, perhaps, of one whose voice no
more

Might tell them that she loved them. There
as well

The woodbine and the shy anemones,
Pale cowslips and the paler asphodel,
The clovers and the yellow buttercups
That nod above the daisies, ere they slept
Heard the sad Winds go by them in the dusk.
Above the stream, where oft Eurydice
Had linger'd with her lover, fragrant pines
Stood motionless and silent; but the reeds
Were waving gently, and the poplars shook
As if they sensed that one, whose voice they
knew,

Beside that stream would sing to them no more.
The stream itself moved slower. Here and
there

The waters eddied with a whisper'd sigh,
And then flow'd on to hint the tragedy

IDYLLS OF GREECE

To hopeless willows bow'd above the pools
Whereon the perfect lilies lay in peace.
Then came the stars, serenely one by one
The while it slowly darken'd; then at once
Ten thousand seem'd to peer upon the world
And see the thing so still amid the corn.
And while they look'd with pity on the face
That stared at theirs so mutely, they began
A song so sad it drew the thin, pale moon
From out her fleecy covert in the east
To ask of them its meaning. And the while
She gazed in mute compassion on the fields,
There near'd the spot one pale as she that lay
And listen'd not—'twas Orpheus, who aloud
Now call'd on her; and call'd, and call'd, and
call'd;
Whose wild strain'd eyes sought here and
everywhere
But never found his poor Eurydice.
And though the Winds still wander'd to and fro
And laid their ghostly hands upon his hair,
He noted not their presence; all that night
He sought for her, rememb'ring when too late
What love had lain behind her lidded eyes
And all the hidden sweetness of her soul.

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

AND though he wander'd till the year
was old

He found her not, and heard no word of
her

From beast or bird. For each, the while he
play'd

Those sad, wild songs of his, was stricken mute
And then forgot all else until he pass'd.

Above his head the stars might answer not
The question of his eyes; and though the Winds
Knew well where she was gather'd, night and
day

Their whispers were unheeded of his ears,
And never might he listen. Up and down
Fair Greece he wander'd. On the mountain
crest

He sang his grief at dawnburst; in the dusk
He trod the scented valleys; but at night
The silent woods allured him, and he lay
And dream'd of her with eyes that would not
close

Until the muffled Midnight bade him sleep.
And now he play'd but seldom, for it seem'd
The earth was far less perfect than of yore
When she was there beside him. She had been
His peace, his inspiration, as the maid
Best loved is inspiration yet is peace;

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And now it seem'd a shadow took her place
Reminding him who never might forget
How fair, how fond that wonder-one had
been.

Through tear-dimm'd eyes he saw her loveliness,
Her hair, her eyes and softly-chisell'd arms
That ever drew him downward as the dusk
About their whispers deepen'd; on his cheek
He felt the touch of kisses, soft and cool
As spirit wings, but ever in his heart
The ache, the longing, and the loneliness.

And soon the corn was garner'd, and the Winds
Foretold pale Winter's coming. One by one
The things that make the world most beautiful
Fell fast asleep; and erst when laughing Spring
Breathed wooingly upon them, and the woods
Were quicken'd by the cadences of birds,
Bright-plumaged, silver-throated, on the hills
He roam'd no more, nor trod the forest paths
In search of her, nor call'd to her again.
For then he knew the gods had gather'd her
Along with other forms of loveliness
To that grey land whereto all things must
come,

Where Pluto reigns with hopeless Proserpine
And whispering ghosts relate their memories.
And knowing this, he was not wholly sad.
To feel assured is better than to doubt

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

Where love's concern'd, or things of consequence.

Who knows, may act; who doubts must hesitate;
And better far to learn at once the worst
Than, fed on fond illusions, to be blown
Or here or there, and shatter'd at the last.
And knowing now that she he loved was not
A thing of earth and sunlight, Orpheus wept,
But sought no more; then knelt, and ask'd the
 gods

To grant him god-like courage, god-like speech,
And strength to match that deathless love of
 his.

Then fared he forth, unflinching, to the place
Where yawn'd a portal to the horrid depths
That men call hell; and by his constancy,
And by the wondrous magic of his lute
Effected there an entrance, braved the Hound
And ever-watchful Furies, and at last,
When wastes of stony horror lay behind,
Erect in Pluto's presence told his tale.

AND long he argued with impassion'd words
Heedless of things that chill'd his very soul.
But Pluto frown'd upon him. "Mine she is,"
He said in short, sharp speech, and merciless.
"Love's dream for her is ended. Mine she is,
This love of thine, this pale Eurydice,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Who hides I know not where among my shades.
Life has been hers. Earth's beauty she has
seen ;

The maid has watch'd the seasons come and go ;
Has ponder'd on the mystery of stars.

Once only may ye love, and once may die ;
Life's sweetness and life's sorrow once may
know.

Thou sayest that she loved thee ; to thy mouth
Her lips have clung in passion. She has lived
Despite her youth ; what more can gods allow ?
Death brings to me my tribute, but alone
He leaves this desolation and this gloom—

Thou, too, art forfeit ; if thou lingerest here
Thou shalt no more earth's loveliness behold.
Therefore, begone ! The Furies bide my call ! ”
But Orpheus knelt before the anger'd one,
And pray'd his pity. “ O dread King ! ” he
cried,

“ A year I hoped my love were blossoming
Among earth's lesser flowers. O bitter Death,
To blow on one so tender ! In the world
So many are that lift thin hands to thee,
And eyes whence light has vanish'd. These in
vain

Make cry to thee to take them ; these in vain,
Hopeless and faint and weary of the day,
Desiring naught and dreaming not at all,

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

Wish for the peace from which thou keepst
them.

Thy hand is placed on youth and loveliness.
The lily fears thee, and the gleaming star
Curves to its end, while yet its soul is bright,
Because thy finger beckons. Bitter Death,
To slay a flower, or my Eurydice!
But thou, O King, implacable but just,
Hast loved, and been enfolden in the arms
That made drear hell as beautiful to thee
As unto me my earth was with mine own.
Delight thou knowest when thy Queen is nigh;
And when she leaves thee, as the gods decreed,
To bless the fields and lure the tulips forth,
Thy heart is heavy and thou smilest not
Till she returns with fragrance in her hair
And in her eyes delicious memories."

THE while he spoke there near'd the ebon
throne

One beautiful as Sorrow, one who moved
Like music in that unillumined place
And was belov'd. About her solemn brows
Her raven hair lay heavy; but her eyes
Were grey with sweet compassion, like the
skies

That watch the earth when winter chastens it.
And when behind her silent lord she stood,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

She touch'd his cheek. "Who, then, is this?"
she ask'd,

"That smells so warm in desolation's midst?
His hair is golden as Sicilian corn,
His mouth is like a poppy. In his cheeks,
That look so like a child's, so rounded they,
The red still lingers, and his eyes betray
A hope for something that is not quite lost."
But Orpheus cried, ere Pluto yet might speak:
"O Queen, frail Queen! I seek Eurydice,
My love, my darling. Death hath conjured her
From off the earth, from where the sunshine is,
And flowers, and birds, and all the things she
loved.

Here am I come to strive with Death for her,
And ask her giving at the hands of him
Who is thy lord and arbiter of hell.
Plead thou for me, O gentle Proserpine,
Dear goddess of the valleys and the fields,
Whose veins are warm. By thee the bliss of
love

Is still remember'd, and the pain thereof
That makes it sacred as the things of dream.
Naught see I here but unimpassion'd eyes;
The air is chill about me, and my words
Sound thinner than the voices of the gulls
In gloomy caves by unrelenting seas.
Plead thou for me that I may lead her hence—

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

My love, my darling, my Eurydice—
To where bright Day awaits us. Hand in hand
We twain must come so soon, O Proserpine;
A little let us whisper, let us dream.
Here Love is not; his wings have never stirr'd
This murky gloom, and here his rosy feet
Have shunn'd the paths worn deep by greedy
Death.

O Proserpine, who sighest and art fair,
A little while I ask thee grant to us
To dream our dreams, a little while to love
And whisper vows together ere we sit
Forever in the shadow of thy throne."

THEN knelt he, and was silent; but his eyes
Were fix'd on her in such intense appeal
That hers were lower'd. On his throne her lord
Sat heavy and impassive, and the ghosts
Encircled them, and sigh'd as sigh the winds
Where darkness veils the ice-wrack of the Poles.
Then slowly to the heart of Orpheus rose
The chill of hopelessness; but, ere its beat
Was menaced by the silence of the twain,
He took his lute, and, sighing, play'd to them
A sad, soft hymn, love's ultimate lament.
And while he play'd, hell's utter awfulness
Was unremember'd as the flush of dawn
Softens the grey of morning. Near and far

IDYLLS OF GREECE

The music trembled. Haggard Ixion
No longer strain'd his shoulder at the wheel
No god might move; the moaning Tantalus
Forgot his thirst, and with protruding tongue
Loll'd at his task and dropp'd his hated sieve.
The crafty Sisypheus beheld his stone
Go thund'ring ever downward through the
gloom

From where it poised beneath his knotted hands;
Yet stood enwapt, forgetful of his sweat,
And strain'd his ears to hear the melody.
And silent ghosts, from whose despairing eyes
Sweet Hope had ever vanish'd, look'd again
On other ghosts around them; asking them
What god had come to their abiding-place
To pour so sweet a music on the mists
That writhed and swirl'd about them. And
afar,

Where lapp'd the Styx's flood the sedgeless
shores,

Or boom'd in caves where Desolation sat
And glared with stony gaze upon the dusk,
Stood one who ever waited, one whose eyes
Were grey and sad, the maid Eurydice;
Who waited there for one who was to come,
Whose heart was ever true to her beloved.
And while she dream'd, all suddenly she heard
The lute's soft call, and hearing it, was sure

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

That he had come. Then turn'd she from the
flood

And pick'd her way across repulsive hell,
Her guide the wondrous music, till she saw
Her kneeling lover; and while yet he play'd
And gazed upon the face of Proserpine,
She knelt beside him, and her heart was glad.
And though she made no sign that she was
there,

But knelt with claspèd hands and wistful face
The while his music warm'd her very soul,
He felt her presence, play'd no more, and turn'd
And there beheld her. "Thou, Eurydice!"
He cried aloud, forgetting hell the while,
And hell's grim ruler and his weeping Queen;
"O grey-eyed love, dear love of mine!" he cried,
Yet deem'd her but an unsubstantial thing
And touch'd her not. "O love whom I have
sought

Since that sad night when all grew dark for me,
White love of dream! To thee, whose ears have
heard

My dusk-impassion'd whispers and my vows
On scented nights repeated, am I come
In murky hell. Fair earth I search'd for thee,
And found thee not, nor even sign of thee—
What brought thee here, O fond Eurydice?"
And then upon her alabaster foot—

IDYLLS OF GREECE

So white it gleam'd against that cinder'd
floor—

She show'd the serpent's marking; and again,
As now he touch'd all tenderly the wound,
The lover cried: "O poor Eurydice!

O love of mine, my love Eurydice!"

And then all hell was silent, for the ghosts
Bemoan'd no more their grey and hopeless fate
In presence of a grief so great as this.

For Orpheus now was kneeling by his love,
And on her foot, the poor, white, wounded foot,
His tears fell fast, while she upon his hair
Had laid the tender blessing of her hands.

But Pluto rose, the music's spell on him,
His great heart soften'd by these lovers' woes.
"Go hence!" he cried. "For love of Proser-
pine,

My spirit's consolation, I forego

This once my rights. In time ye both shall
stand

Before my throne. Come then with tearless
eyes,

And thanking me for years of happiness.

Day breaks above. On bush and meadow lies
The healing dew of heaven; upon your hearts
I lay the blessing of forgetfulness

Lest future dreams affright ye. Take thy lute,
O simple singer with the eyes of dream,

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

And lead the way with music. To the light
Tread slowly and undoubting. But beware,
O thou whose heart is still solicitous,
Thou look'st not back to where she follows
thee——

This love of thine, whose eyes so tender are—
Nor wait her answer, till the birds proclaim
Hell's mouth is far behind ye. Haste ye hence
Before I weaken and demand my toll.
And when ye stand together in the light,
Forgetful of this darkness, and the wind
Intones for ye its welcome, unto her
For whom I pardon, gentle Proserpine,
Give praise and thanks. Take now thy lute,
and go!”

THEN Orpheus rose, and climb'd unfear-
ingly

The upward path, and smote his wondrous lute
That she might hear, who slowly follow'd him;
While envious ghosts, sweet liberty denied,
Above his head moan'd ever, and essay'd
To turn him back from where the Day allured.
But close behind he heard the limping step
Of her he loved and much it hearten'd him;
And fain had he beheld her, fain had turn'd,
Yet dared not look, so ever cried to her:
“Eurydice! O fond Eurydice!

IDYLLS OF GREECE

Art thou still there, O sweet Eurydice? ”
And still he play'd, and still crept on and up,
And sang the songs she knew and loved so well;
And still he heard her footfall, faint and soft,
And sweeter than the music of the rain;
And still he cried—it seems I hear it now;
That bitter cry of yearning and of love—
“ Eurydice! O fond Eurydice! ”
But slowly he ascended. Far away
The darkness seem'd to tremble; far away,
Yet light was there behind it. One by one
The ghosts fell back, until their sighs were faint
As the hush'd moan of winds in distant pines.
And on and up he stagger'd; on and up
Past jagged rocks and awful precipice
And ledges that might fall and smother him.
And still he cried, O God! how wearily:
“ Eurydice! O fond Eurydice! ”
And still, behind, he heard that limping step,
The limping step that told him she was near,
Creep on, and up. And now her breath he
heard,
And oh! it sounded sweeter than her voice
That day her lips had first lain soft on his.
And now the air was clearer. Far away
He heard the pleasant murmur of the world,
The joyous anthem of the splendid Winds
That bade him come to lead them as of yore;

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

He saw, he thought, the white hand of the Day
Outstretch'd to his to help him; and his eyes
Were strain'd against its welcome, for it
 seem'd

All hell would draw him backward to the gloom,
And Death had crept between his love and him.
And on and up he struggled, playing still
And crying ever to that love of his:

“Eurydice! O fond Eurydice!

Art thou still there, O dear Eurydice?”

But now insistent noises fill'd his ears,
And grew each moment louder, songs of birds,
The pleasant splash of water in a pool;
And though he cried no more, and softly play'd,
And strain'd to catch the music of her step
All silent seem'd behind him. And the while
He struggled on, he doubted. Ah! so near
The blessèd world, those dear and guileless
 birds,

That warm, suggested sunlight. Even now
He felt the Wind's soft kiss upon his hair,
And so—he turn'd! But even while he turn'd
With arms so eager, so importunate,
He saw his love, his pale Eurydice,
Sink downward, ever downward, and become,
While yet her eyes were fix'd upon his own
And slowly waned the holy light in them,
Immerged in chilling shadows. Down she sank,

IDYLLS OF GREECE

And soon was lost forever ; and although
He call'd and call'd, and pray'd the gods for
death

That he might be forever by her side,
The massive rocks with pond'rous movement
closed

And left him there, lamenting, and alone.

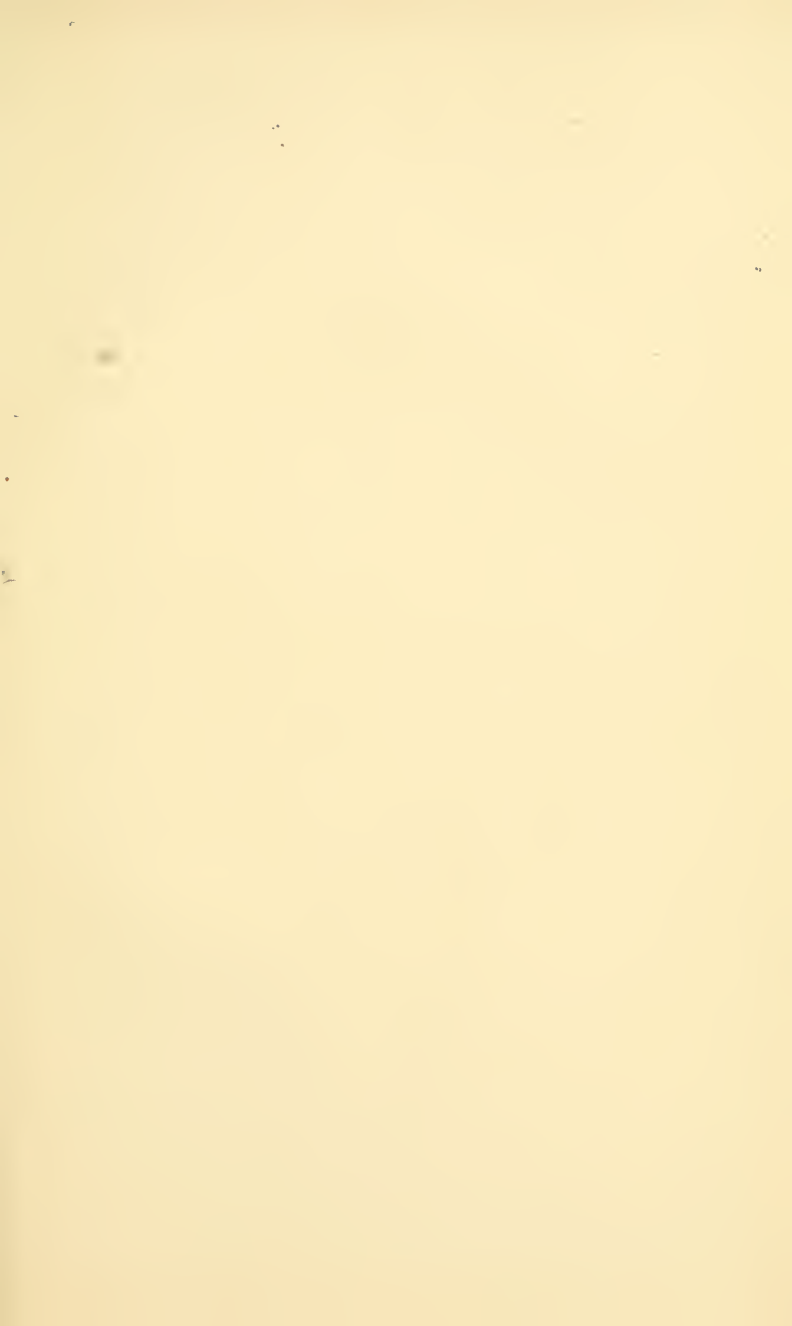
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